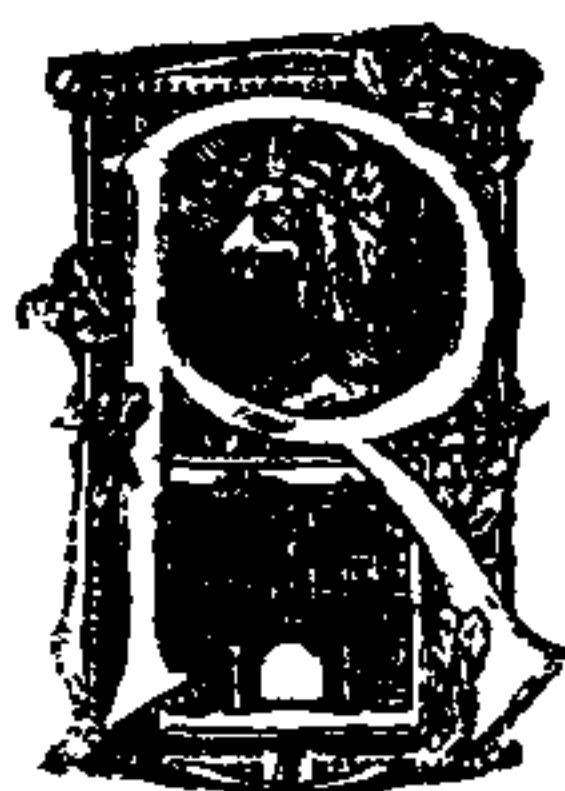


THE BOY TAR

BY
CAPTAIN MAYNE REID



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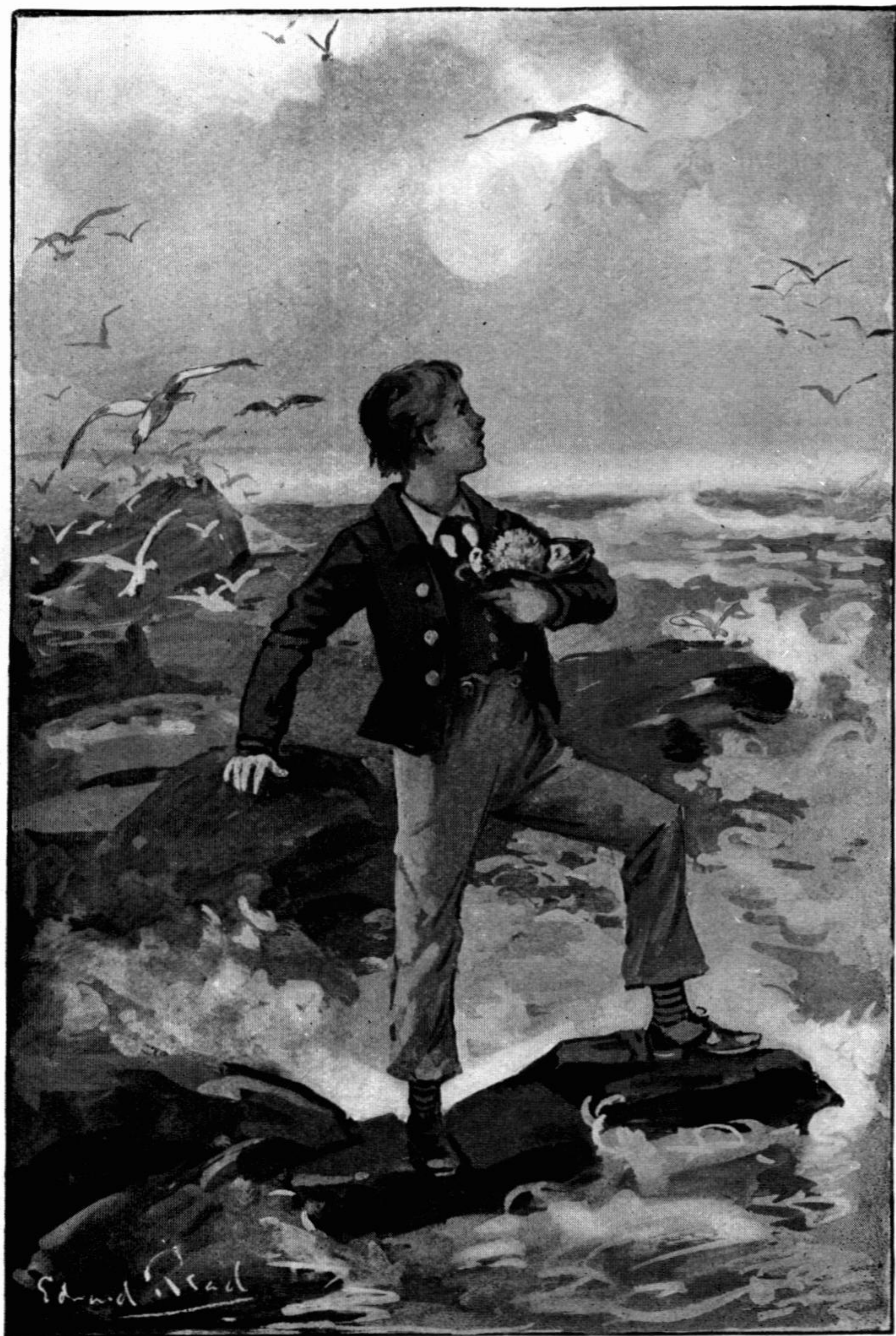
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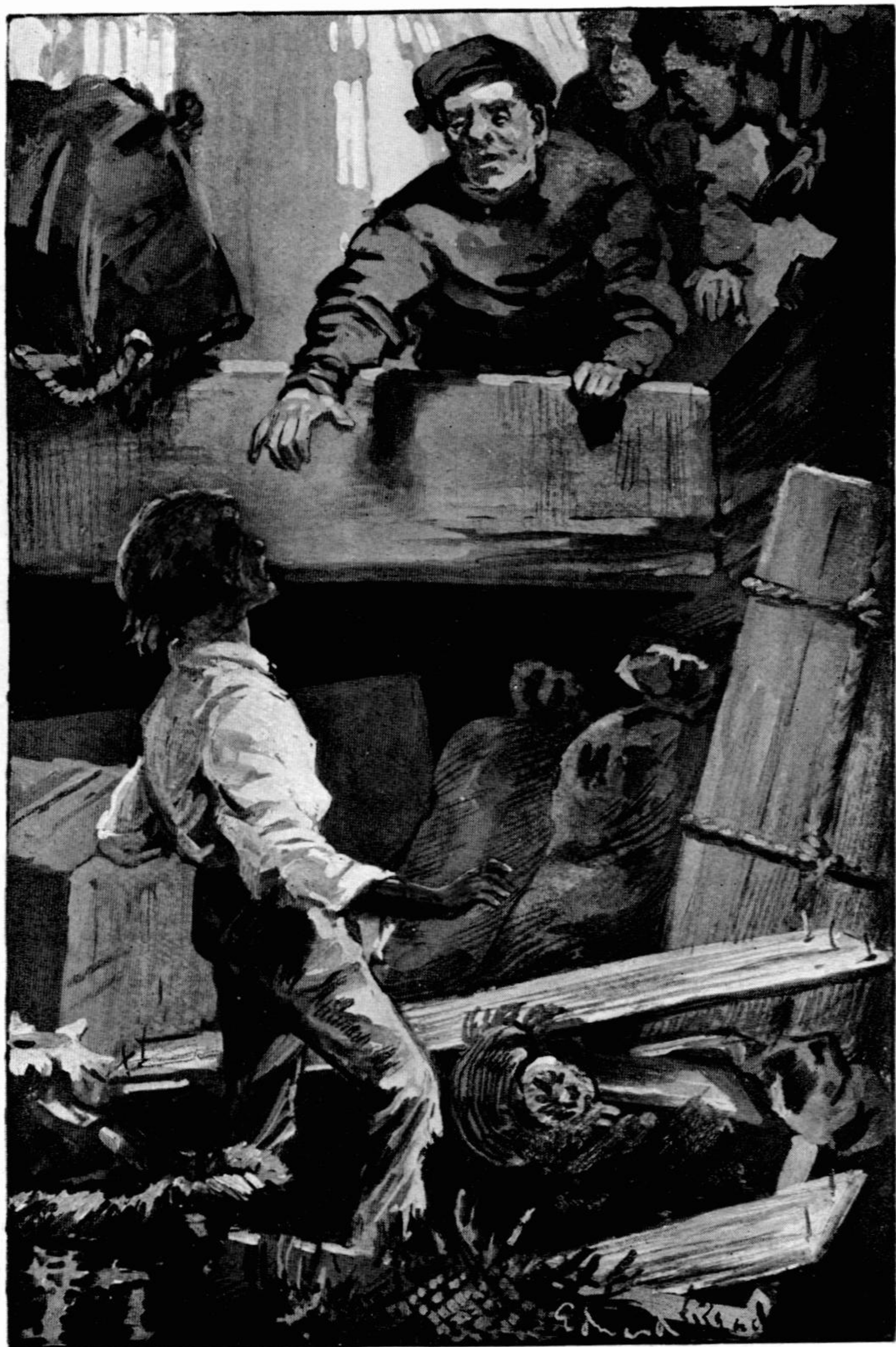
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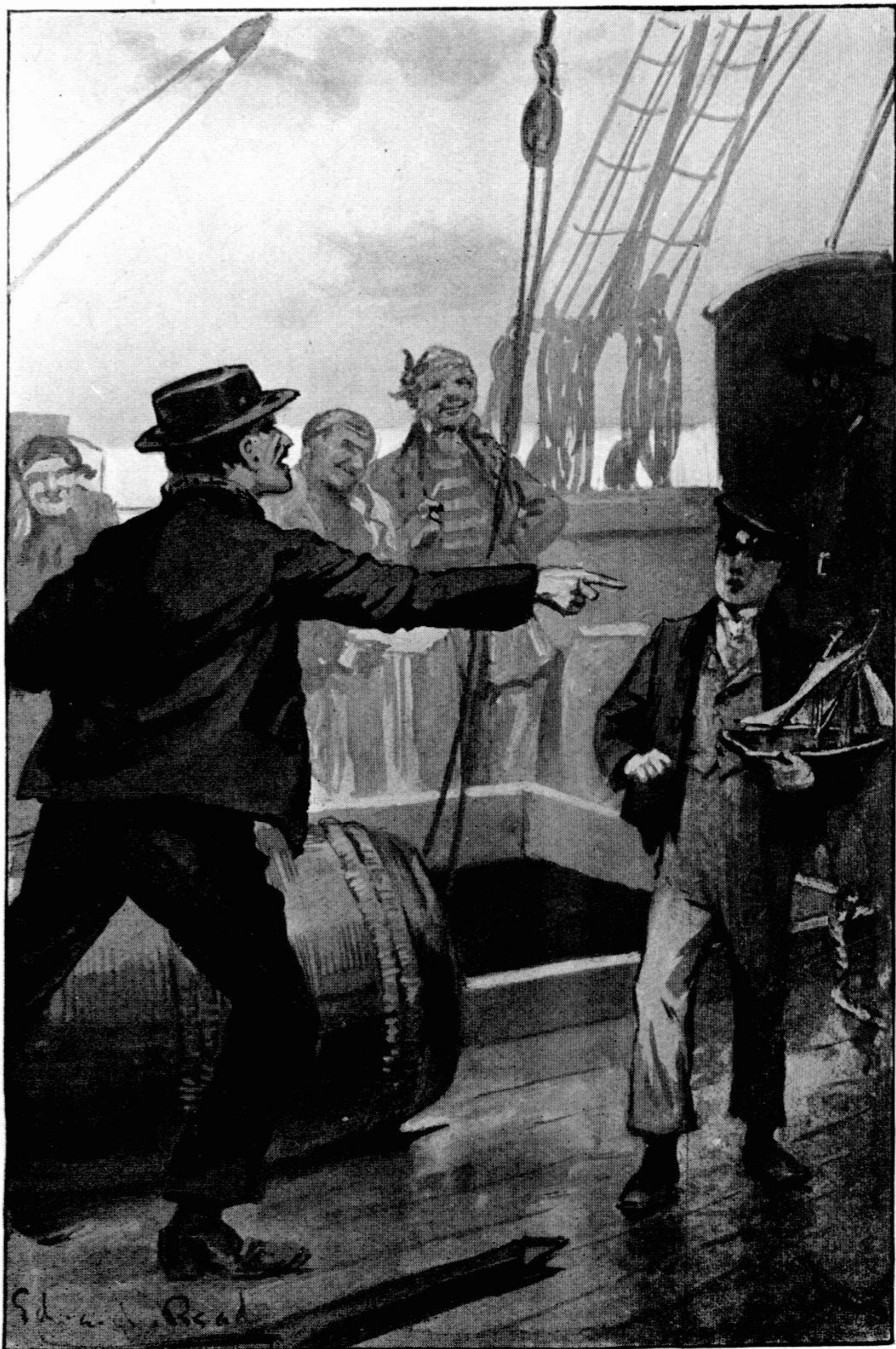
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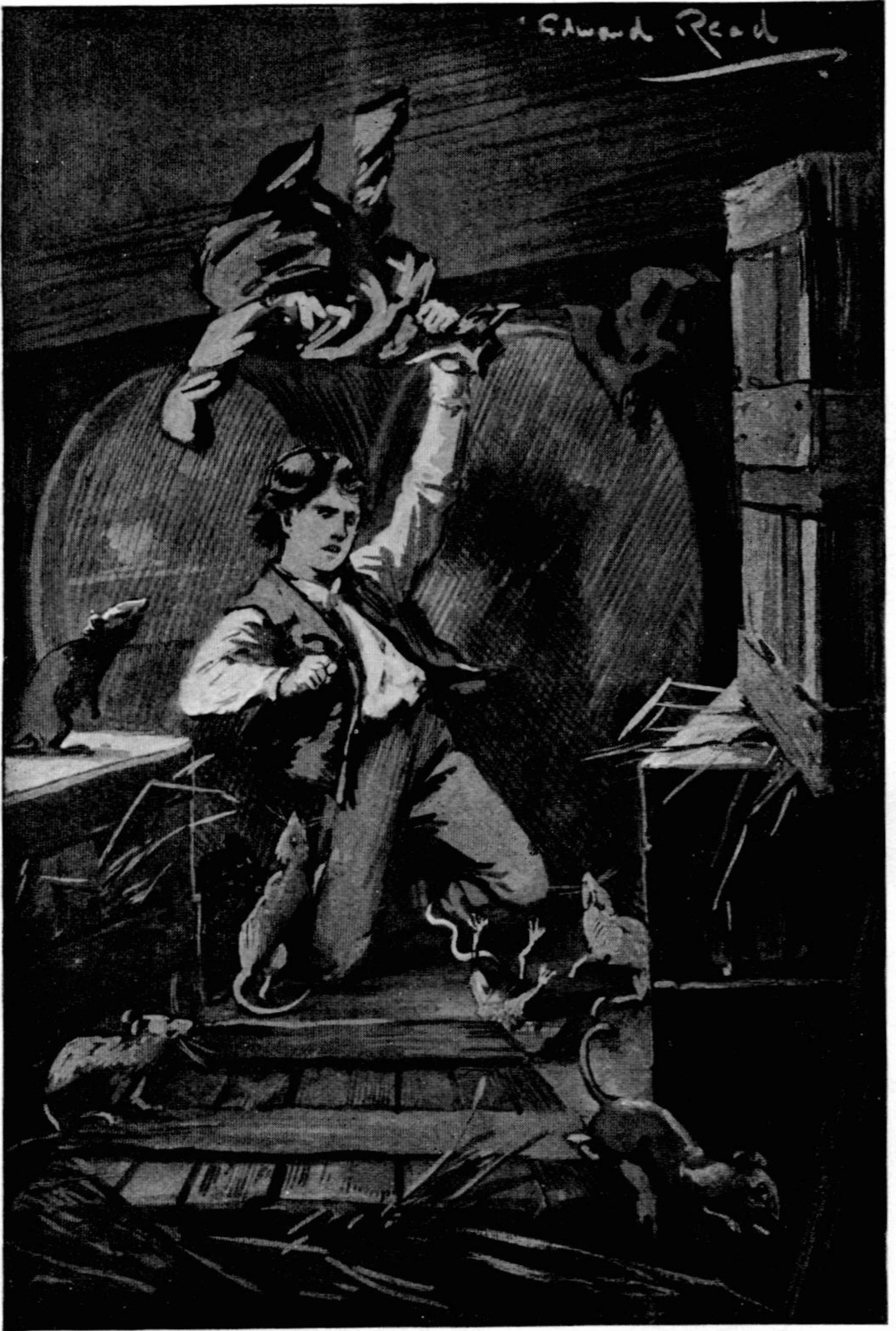


“WHAT MIGHT YOU BE WANTING ABOARD?”



“BE OFF NOW, I SAY!”

Edward Read



A SWARM OF INTRUDERS.

THE BOY TAR

CHAPTER I

MY BOY AUDIENCE

My name is Philip Forster, and I am now an old man.

I reside in a quiet little village, that stands upon the sea shore, at the bottom of a very large bay—one of the largest in our island.

I have styled it a quiet village, and so it really is, though it boasts of being a seaport. There is a little pier or jetty of chiselled granite, alongside which you may usually observe a pair of sloops, about the same number of schooners, and now and then a brig. Big ships cannot come in. But you may always note a large number of boats, either hauled up on the beach, or scudding about the bay, and from this, you may conclude that the village derives its support rather from fishing than commerce. Such in reality is the fact.

It is my native village—the place in which I was born, and where it is my intention to die.

Notwithstanding this, my fellow-villagers know very little about me. They only know me as ‘Captain Forster’, or more specifically as ‘The Captain’, this *soubriquet* being extended to me as the only person in the place entitled to it.

Strictly speaking, I am not entitled to it. I have never been a captain of soldiers, nor have I held that rank in the navy. I have only been the master of a merchant vessel,—in other words, a ‘skipper’. But the villagers are courteous, and by their politeness I am styled ‘Captain’.

They know that I live in a pretty cottage about half a mile from the village, up shore ; they know that I live alone—for my old housekeeper can scarce be accounted as company ; they see me each day pass through the place with my telescope under my arm ; they note that I walk out on the pier, and sweep the offing with my glass, and then, perhaps, return home again, or wander for an hour or two along the shore. Beyond these facts, my fellow-villagers know but little of myself, my habits, or my history.

They have a belief among them that I have been a great traveller. They know that I have many books, and that I read much ; and they have got it into their heads that I am a wonderful scholar.

I *have* been a great traveller, and am a great reader, but the simple villagers are mistaken as to my scholarship. In my youth I was denied the advantages of a fine education, and what little literary knowledge I possess has been acquired by self-instruction—hasty and interrupted—during the brief intervals of an active life.

I have said that my fellow-villagers know very little about me, and you are no doubt surprised at this ; since among them I began my life, and among them I have declared my intention of ending it. Their ignorance of me is easily explained. I was but twelve years of age when I left home, and for forty years after I never set foot in my native place, nor eyes upon any of its inhabitants.

He must be a famous man who would be remembered after forty years' absence ; and I, scarce a boy at going forth, returned to find myself quite forgotten. Even my parents were scarce remembered. Both had died before I went away from home, and while I was only a mere lad. Besides, my father, who was a mariner by profession, was seldom or never at home, and I remember little else about him, than how I grieved when the news came that his ship was lost,

and he with most of his crew were drowned. Alas ! my mother did not long survive him ; and their death occurring such a long time ago, it is but natural that both should be forgotten among a people with whom they had but slight intercourse. Thus, then, is it explained how I chance to be such a stranger in my native place.

But you are not to suppose that I am lonely or without companions. Though I have ceased to follow my profession of the sea, and returned home to spend the remainder of my days in a quiet, peaceful way, I am by no means of an unsocial disposition or morose habits. On the contrary, I am fond, as I have ever been, of social intercourse ; and old man though I be, I take great delight in the society of young people, especially little boys. I can boast, too, that with all these in the village I am a favourite. I spend hours upon hours in helping them to fly their kites, and sail their tiny boats ; for I remember how much delight I derived from these pastimes when I was myself a boy.

As I take part in their sports, little do the simple children think that the gentle old man who can so amuse them and himself, has spent most of his life amidst scenes of wild adventure and deadly peril ; and yet such has been my history.

There are those in the village, however, who are better acquainted with some chapters from the story of my life—passages of it which they have heard from my own lips, for I am never disinclined to relate to those who may be worthy of hearing it any interesting adventure through which I may have passed ; and even in our quiet village I have found an audience that merits the narrator. Schoolboys have been my listeners ; for there is a famous school near the village—an ‘ establishment for young gentlemen ’ it is styled—and it is from this I draw my most attentive auditory.

These boys and I used to meet in our rambles along the shore, and observing my weather-beaten, salt-

water look, they fancied that I could tell them tales of wild scenes and strange incidents that I had encountered far over the sea. Our meetings were frequent—almost daily—and soon a friendly acquaintance sprung up between us ; until, at their solicitation, I began to relate to them an occasional adventure of my life. Often I may have been observed, seated upon the ‘ bent ’ grass of the beach, encircled by a crowd of these well-dressed youths, whose parted lips and eager eyes betokened the interest they felt in my narrations.

I am not ashamed to declare that I, too, felt pleasure in this sort of thing : like all old soldiers and sailors, who proverbially delight to ‘ fight their battles o’er again ’.

These desultory recitals continued for some time, until one day, as I met my young friends in the ordinary way, only somewhat earlier than common, I saw that there was something unusual in the wind. They mustered stronger than was their wont, and I noticed that one of them—the biggest boy of the crowd—held a folded paper in his hand, upon which I could perceive there was writing.

As I drew near, the paper was placed in my hands without a word being said ; and I saw by the superscription that it was directed to myself.

I opened the paper, and soon perceived the nature of its contents. It was a ‘ petition ’ signed by all the boys present. It ran thus :—

‘ Dear Captain,—We have been allowed holiday for the whole of to-day ; and we know of no way in which we could spend it with so much of pleasure and profit, as by listening to you. We have therefore taken the liberty of asking you to indulge us, by the narration of some remarkable incident that has happened to you. A stirring passage we should prefer, for we know that many of these have befallen you during your adventurous life ; but choose whatever one it may be most

pleasant for you to relate ; and we shall promise to listen attentively, since one and all of us know that it will be an easy thing to keep that promise. And now, dear captain ! grant us the favour we ask, and your petitioners shall be for ever grateful.'

Such a polite request could not be refused ; and without hesitation I declared my intention to gratify my young friends with a chapter from my life. The chapter chosen was one which I thought would be most interesting to them—as it gave some account of my own boy-life, and of my first voyage to sea—which, from the odd circumstances under which it was made, I have termed a ' Voyage in the Dark '.

Seating myself upon the pebbly beach, in full view of the bright sea, and placing my auditory around me, I began.

CHAPTER II

SAVED BY SWANS

FROM my earliest days, I was fond of the water—instinctively so. Had I been born a duck, or a water-dog, I could not have liked it better. My father had been a seaman, and his father before him, and grandfather too ; so that perhaps I inherited the instinct. Whether or not, my aquatic tastes were as strong as if the water had been my natural element ; and I have been told, though I do not myself remember it, that when still but a mere child, it was with difficulty I could be kept out of puddles and ponds. In fact, the first adventure of my life occurred in a pond, and that I remember well. Though it was neither so strange nor so terrible as many adventures that befell me afterwards, still it was rather a curious one, and I shall give you it, as illustrating the early *penchant* I had for aquatic pursuits. I was but a very little boy at the time, and the odd incident occurring, as it were, at the very threshold of my life, seemed to foreshadow the destiny of my future career—that I was to experience as in reality I have experienced, many vicissitudes and adventures.

I have said I was but a very little boy at the time—just big enough to go about, and just of that age when boys take to sailing paper-boats. I knew how to construct these out of the leaf of an old book, or a piece of a newspaper ; and often had I sent them on voyages across the duck-pond, which was my ocean. I may say, I had got a step beyond the mere paper-boats :

with my six months' stock of pocket-money, which I had saved for the purpose, I had succeeded in purchasing a full-rigged sloop, from an old fisherman, who had 'built' her during his hours of leisure. She was only six inches in length of keel, by less than three in breadth of beam, and her tonnage, if registered—which it never was—would have been about half a pound avoirdupois. A small craft you will style her; but at that time, in my eyes, she was as grand as a three-decker.

I esteemed her too large for the duck-pond, and resolved to go in search of a piece of water where she should have more room to exhibit her sailing qualities.

This I soon found in the shape of a very large pond—or lake, I should rather call it—where the water was clear as crystal, and where there was usually a nice light breeze playing over the surface—just strong enough to fill the sails, and drive my little sloop along like a bird on the wing—so that she often crossed the pond before I myself could get round to the other side to receive her into my hands again.

Many a race have I had with my little sloop, in which sometimes she, and sometimes I, proved victorious, according as the wind was favourable or unfavourable to her course.

Now this pretty pond—by the shores of which I used to delight myself, and where I spent many of the happiest hours of my boyhood—was not public property. It was situated in a gentleman's park, that extended backward from the end of the village, and the pond of course belonged to the owner of the park. He was a kind and liberal gentleman, however, and permitted the villagers to go through his grounds whenever they pleased, and did not object to the boys sailing their boats upon the ornamental water, or even playing cricket in one of his fields, provided they did not act rudely or destroy any of the shrubs or plants that grew along the walks. It was very kind and good of him

to allow this freedom ; and we, the boys of the village, were sensible of this, and I think on the whole we behaved as if we were so ; for I never heard of any damage being done that was deemed worthy of complaint. The park and pond are there still—you all know them ?—but the kind gentleman I speak of has long since left this world ; for he was an *old* gentleman, then, and that is sixty years ago.

Upon the little lake, there was at that time a flock of swans—six, if I remember aright—besides other water-fowl of rare kinds. The boys took great delight in feeding these pretty creatures ; and it was a common thing for one or other of us to bring pieces of bread, and chuck them to the water-fowl. For my part, I was very fond of this little piece of extravagance ; and, whenever I had the opportunity, I came to the lake with my pockets crammed.

The fowls, and especially the swans, under this treatment had grown so tame, that they would eat out of our hands, without exhibiting the slightest fear of us.

There was a particular way of giving them their food, in which we used to take great delight. On one side of the lake, there was a bank that rose three feet or so above the surface of the water. Here the pond was deep, and there was no chance for either the swans, or any other creature, to land at this place without taking to wing. The bank was steep, without either shelf or stair to ascend by. In fact, it rather hung over, than shelved.

At this point we used to meet the swans, that were always ready to come when they saw us ; and then, placing the piece of bread in the split end of a rod, and holding it out high above them, we enjoyed the spectacle of the swans stretching up their long necks, and occasionally leaping upward out of the water to snatch it, just as dogs would have done. All this, you will perceive, was rare fun for boys.

Now I come to the promised adventure.

One day, I had proceeded to the pond, carrying my sloop with me as usual. It was at an early hour ; and on reaching the ground, I found that none of my companions had yet arrived. I launched my sloop, however ; and then walked around the shore to meet her on the opposite side.

There was scarcely a breath of wind, and the sloop sailed slowly. I was therefore in no hurry, but sauntered along at my leisure. On leaving home I had not forgotten the swans, which were my great pets : such favourites, indeed, that I very much fear they induced me on more than one occasion to commit small thefts for them ; since the slices of bread with which my pockets were crammed, had been rather surreptitiously obtained from the domestic larder.

Be this as it may, I had brought their allowance along with me ; and on reaching the high bank, I halted to give it them.

All six, who knew me well, with proud arching necks and wings slightly elevated, came `gliding rapidly across the pond to meet me ; and in a few seconds arrived under the bank, where they moved about with upstretched beaks, and eyes eagerly scanning my movements. They knew that I had called them thither to be kind to them.

Having procured a slight sapling, and split it at the end, I placed a piece of bread in the notch, and proceeded to amuse myself with the manœuvres of the birds.

One piece after another was snatched away from the stick, and I had nearly emptied my pockets, when all at once the sod upon which I was standing gave way under me, and I fell *plump* into the water.

I fell with a plunge like a large stone, and as I could not swim a stroke, I should have gone to the bottom like one, but it so happened that I came down right in the middle of the swans, who were no doubt taken as much by surprise as myself.

Now it was not through any peculiar presence of mind on my part, but simply from the instinct of self-preservation, which is common to every living creature, that I made an effort to save myself. This I did by throwing out my hands, and endeavouring to seize hold of something, just as drowning men will catch even at straws. But I caught something better than a straw, for I chanced to seize upon the leg of one of the biggest and strongest of the swans, and to that I held on, as if my life depended on my not letting it go.

At the first plunge my eyes and ears had been filled with water, and I was hardly sensible of what I was doing. I could hear a vast splashing and spluttering as the birds scattered away in affright, but in another second of time I had consciousness enough to perceive that I had got hold of the leg of the swan, and was being towed rapidly through the water. I had sense enough to retain my hold ; and in less time than I have taken to tell it, I was dragged better than half across the pond, which, after all, was but a short distance. The swan made no attempt to swim, but rather fluttered along the surface, using his wings, and perhaps the leg that was still free, to propel himself forward. Terror, no doubt, had doubled both his strength and his energies, else he could never have towed such a weight, big and strong as he was. How long the affair would have lasted, it is hard to say. Not very long, however. The bird might have kept above water a good while, but I could not have held out much longer. I was every moment being ducked under, the water at each immersion getting into my mouth and nostrils. I was fast losing consciousness, and would soon have been forced to let go.

Just at this crisis, to my great joy, I felt something touch me underneath ; some rough object had struck against my knees. It was the stones and gravel at the bottom of the lake ; and I perceived that I was now in water of no great depth. The bird, in struggling to

escape, had passed over the portion of the lake where it was deep and dangerous, and was now close to the edge, where it shoaled.

I did not hesitate a moment ; I was only too glad to put an end to the towing match, and therefore released my grasp from the leg of the swan. The bird, thus lightened, immediately took to wing ; and, screeching like a wild fowl, rose high into the air.

For myself, I found bottom at once, and after some staggering, and a good deal of sneezing and hiccoughing, I regained my feet ; and then wading out, stood once more safe upon *terra firma*.

I was so badly terrified by the incident that I never thought of looking after my sloop. Leaving her to finish her voyage as she might, I ran away as fast as my legs would carry me, and never made halt or pause till I had reached home and stood with dripping garments in front of the fire.

CHAPTER III

THE ' UNDER-TOW '

You will fancy that the lesson I had thus received should have been a warning to me to keep away from the water. Not so, however. So far as that went, the ducking did me no good, though it proved beneficial in other respects. It taught me the danger of getting into water over one's depth, which I had before then but little appreciated; and young as I was, I perceived the advantage of being able to swim. The peril from which I had so narrowly escaped, stimulated me to form a resolve, and that was—to learn the art of swimming.

I was encouraged in this resolution by my mother, as also by a letter received from my father, who was then abroad; and in which he gave directions that I should be taught to swim in the best manner. It was just what I desired, and with the intention of becoming a first-rate swimmer, I went about it in right earnest. Once and sometimes twice each day during the warm weather—that is, after school was out—I betook myself to the water, where I might be seen splashing and spluttering about like a young porpoise. Some bigger boys, who had already learnt to swim, gave me a lesson or two; and I soon experienced the delightful sensation of being able to float upon my back without assistance from any one. I well remember how proud I felt on the occasion when I first accomplished this natatorial feat.

And here, young reader, let me advise you by all

means to imitate my example, and learn to swim. You know not how soon you may stand in need of a knowledge of this useful art ; how soon you may be called upon to practise it perforce. You know not but that sooner or later it may be the means of saving your life.

At the present time, the chances of death by drowning are multiplied far beyond anything of the kind in past ages. Almost everybody now travels across seas, oceans, and upon large rivers, and the number of people who annually risk their lives on the water, voyaging on business, pleasure, or in the way of emigration, is scarce credible. Of these, a proportion—in stormy years a large one—perish by drowning.

I do not mean to assert that a swimmer, even the best, if cast away at a great distance from shore, in mid-Atlantic, for instance, or even in the middle of the English Channel—would have any prospect of swimming to land. That, of course, would be impracticable. But there are often other chances of life being saved, besides that of getting to land. A boat may be reached, a spar, an empty hencoop or barrel ; and there are many instances on record of lives having been saved by such slight means. Another vessel, too, may be in sight, may hasten to the scene of the disaster, and the strong swimmer may be still afloat upon her arrival ; while those who could not swim, must of course have gone to the bottom.

But you must know that it is neither in the middle of the Atlantic, nor of any great ocean, that most vessels are wrecked and lives are lost. Some are, it is true—when a storm rages with extreme fury, ‘blowing great guns’, as the seamen phrase it, and blowing a ship almost to atoms. These events, however, are extremely rare, and bear but a small proportion to the number of wrecks that take place within sight of the shore, and frequently upon the beach itself. It is in ‘castaways’ of this kind, that the greatest

number of lives are sacrificed, under circumstances when, by a knowledge of the art of swimming, many of them might have been saved. Not a year passes, but there is a record of hundreds of individuals who have been drowned within cable's length of the shore—ships full of emigrants, soldiers, and sailors, have sunk with all on board, leaving only a few good swimmers survivors of the wreck! Similar 'accidents' occur in rivers, scarce two hundred yards in width; and you yourselves are acquainted with the annual drownings, even in the narrow and icy Serpentine!

With these facts before the eyes of the world, you will wonder that the world does not take warning, and at once learn to swim.

It may be wondered, too, that governments do not compel the youth to learn this simple accomplishment; but that indeed is hardly to be wondered at, since the business of governments in all ages has been rather to tax than to teach their people.

It seems to me, however, that it would be a very easy thing for governments to compel all those who travel by ships, to provide themselves with a life-preserver. By this cheap and simple contrivance, I am prepared to show that thousands of lives would be annually saved; and no one would grumble at either the cost or inconvenience of carrying so useful an article.

Governments take special care to tax travellers for a piece of worthless paper, called a passport. Once you have paid for this, it signifies not to them how soon you and your passport go to the bottom of the sea.

Well, young reader, whether it be the desire of your government or not, take a hint from me, and make yourself a good swimmer. Set about it at once—that is, if the weather be warm enough—and don't miss a day while it continues so. Be a swimmer before you become a man; for when you have reached manhood, you will most probably find neither time,

opportunity, nor inclination to practise ; besides, you may run many risks of being drowned long before there is hair upon your lip.

For myself, I have had a variety of hair-breadth escapes from drowning. The very element which I loved so dearly, seemed the most desirous of making a victim of me ; and I should have deemed it ungrateful, had I not known that the wild billows were unreasoning, irresponsible creatures ; and I had too recklessly laid 'my hand upon their mane'.

It was but a few weeks after my ducking in the pond, and I had already taken several swimming lessons, when I came very near making my last essay at this aquatic exercise.

It was not in the pond that the incident occurred, for that, being a piece of ornamental water, and private property, as I have told you, was not permitted to be used as a bathing place.

But the people of a sea-shore town need no lake in which to disport themselves. The great salt sea gives them a free bath, and our village had its bathing beach in common with others of its kind. Of course, then, my swimming lessons were taken in salt water.

The beach which was habitually used by the villagers, had not the best name as a bathing place. It was pretty enough, with yellow sand, white shells, and pebbles ; but there was what is termed an 'under-tow'—in one particular place stronger than elsewhere ; and at times it was a dangerous matter to get within the influence of this 'under-tow', unless the person so exposing himself was a good and strong swimmer.

There was a legend among the villagers, that some one had been drowned by this current ; but that was an occurrence of long ago, and had almost ceased to be talked about. There were also one or two more modern instances of bathers being carried out to sea, but finally saved by boats sent after them.

I remember at that time having been struck with a fact relating to these mishaps ; and this was, that the older inhabitants of the village, and they who were of most consequence in the place, never liked to talk about them ; either shrugging their shoulders and remaining silent, or giving the legends a flat contradiction. Some of them even went so far as to deny the existence of an 'under-tow', while others contented themselves by asserting that it was perfectly harmless. I always noticed, however, that parents would not permit their boys to bathe near the place where the dangerous current was represented to exist.

I never knew the reason why the villagers were so unwilling to acknowledge the 'under-tow', and the truth of the stories connected therewith. That is, I knew it not until long, long afterwards—until I came home again after my forty years of adventure. On my return, I found the same silence and shrugging of the shoulders, although by a generation of villagers altogether different from those I had left behind. And this, too, notwithstanding that several accidents had occurred in my absence, to prove that the 'under-tow' did actually exist, and that it was actually dangerous.

But I was then older and better able to reason about men's motives, and I soon fathomed the mystery. It was this : our village is, as you know, what is called a 'watering-place', and derived some support from visitors who came to it to spend a few weeks of their summer. It is a watering-place upon a small scale, it is true, but were there to be much talk about the 'under-tow', or too much credence given to legends of people who have been drowned by it, it would become a watering-place on a still smaller scale, or might cease to be one altogether. Therefore the less you say of the 'under-tow', the better for your own popularity among the wise men of the village.

Now, my young friends, I have been making a long story about what you will deem a very ordinary adventure, after all. It is simply to end by my telling you that I was drowned by the 'under-tow'—actually *drowned*!

You will say that I could not have been *drowned dead*, though that is a doubtful point, for, as far as my feelings were concerned, I am certain I should not have known it had I never been restored to life again. No, I should not have felt pain had I been cut into a hundred pieces while I was in that state, nor would I ever have come to life again had it not been for somebody else. That somebody else was a fine young waterman of our village, by name Harry Blew, and to him was I indebted for my *second* life.

The incident, as I have said, was of the ordinary kind, but I relate it to show how I became acquainted with Harry Blew, whose acquaintance and example had an important influence on my after-life.

I had gone to the beach to bathe as usual, at a point new to me, and where I had not seen many people bathe before. It chanced to be one of the worst places for this 'under-tow', and shortly after entering the water I got into its gripe, and was drawn outward into the open sea, far beyond the distance I could have swum back. As much from terror, that paralysed my strength, as aught else—for I was aware of my danger—I could swim no further, but sank to the bottom like a piece of lead!

I did not know that I had ever come up again. I knew nothing at all about what happened after. I only remembered seeing a boat near me, and a man in it; and then all was dark, and I heard a loud rumbling like thunder in my ears, and my consciousness went out like the snuffing of a candle.

It returned again, thanks to young Harry Blew, and when I knew that I was still alive, I re-opened my eyes, and saw a man kneeling above me, rubbing

me all over with his hands, and pushing my belly up under my ribs, and blowing into my mouth, and tickling my nostrils with a feather, and performing a great variety of such antic manœuvres upon me.

That was Harry Blew bringing me to life again; and as soon as he had partially succeeded, he lifted me up in his arms and carried me home to my mother, who was nearly distracted on receiving me; and then wine was poured down my throat, and hot bricks and bottles were put to my feet, and my nose anointed with hartshorn, and my body rolled in warm blankets, and many other appliances were administered, and many remedies had I to take, before my friends considered the danger to be over, and that I should be likely to live.

But it was all over at length, and in twenty hours' time I was on my feet again, and as brisk and well as ever.

I had now had my warning of the water, if that could have been of any service. But it was not, as the sequel will show.

CHAPTER IV

THE DINGY

No ; the warning was all in vain. Even the narrow escape I had had, did not cure me of my fondness for being on the water, but rather had an opposite effect.

The acquaintance thus singularly formed between the young waterman and myself, soon ripened into a strong feeling of friendship. His name, as I have said, was Harry Blew, and—if I may be allowed to play upon the word—he was ‘true blue’, for he was gifted with a heart as kind as it was brave. I need hardly add that I grew vastly fond of him, and he appeared to reciprocate the feeling, for he acted towards me from that time forward as if I had saved *his* life, instead of its being the other way. He took great pains to make me perfect in swimming ; and he also taught me the use of the oar ; so that in a short time I was able to row in a very creditable manner, and far better than any boy of my age or size. I even attained to such proficiency that I could manage a pair of oars, and pull about without any assistance from my instructor. This I esteemed a great feat, and I was not a little proud when I was entrusted (as was frequently the case) to take the young waterman’s boat from the little cove where he kept her, to some point on the beach where he might be waiting to take up a fare. Perhaps in passing an anchored sloop, or near the beach, where some people might be sauntering, I may have heard remarks made in a

sneering tone, such as, ' You are a queer chap to be handlin' a pair o' oars ! ' or, ' Oh, jimminy ! Look at that millikin pin, boys ! ' And then I could hear other jeers mingled with shouts of laughter. But this did not mortify me in the least. On the contrary, I felt proud to show them that, small as I was, I could propel my craft in the right direction, and perhaps as rapidly as many of them that were even twice my size.

After a time I heard no more of these taunts, unless now and then from some stranger to the place. The people of our village soon learned how well I could manage a boat ; and small as I was, they held me in respect—at all events, they no longer jeered at me. Often they would call me the ' little waterman ', or the ' young sailor ', or still oftener was I known by the name of the ' Boy Tar '. It was my father's design that, like himself, I should follow the sea as a calling ; and had he lived to make another voyage, it was his intention to have taken me away with him. I was encouraged, therefore, in these ideas ; and moreover, my mother always dressed me in sailor costume of the most approved pattern—blue cloth jacket and trousers, with black silk handkerchief and folding collar. Of all this I was very proud, and it was my costume as much as aught else, that led to my receiving the *soubriquet* of the ' Boy Tar '. This title pleased me best of any, for it was Harry Blew that first bestowed it on me, and from the day that he saved me from drowning, I regarded him as my true friend and protector.

He was at this time rather a prosperous young fellow, himself owner of his boat—nay, better still, he had two boats. One was much bigger than the other—the yawl, as he styled her—and this was the one he mostly used, especially when three or four persons wanted a sail. The lesser boat was a little ' dingy ' he had just purchased, and which for con-

venience he took with him when his fare was only a single passenger, since the labour of rowing it was much less. In the watering season, however, the larger boat was more often required ; since parties of pleasure were out every day in it, and at such times the little one lay idle at its moorings. I was then welcome to the use of it for my own pleasure, and could take it when I liked, either by myself or with a companion, if I chose to have one. It became my custom, therefore, after school hours, or indeed whenever I had any spare time, to be off to the dingy, and rowing it all about the harbour. I was rarely without a companion—for more than one of my schoolfellows relished this sort of thing—and many of them even envied me the fine privilege I had in being almost absolute master of a boat. Of course, whenever I desired company, I had no need to go alone ; it was not often that I was so. Some one or other of the boys was my companion on every excursion that was made, and these were almost daily—at least, every day on which the weather was calm enough to allow of it. With such a small cockleshell of a boat, we dared not go out when it was not calm ; and with regard to this, I had been duly cautioned by Henry Blew himself. Our excursions only extended to a short distance from the village, usually up the bay, though sometimes down, but I always took care to keep near the shore, and never ventured far out, lest the little boat might be caught in a squall and get me into danger.

As time passed on, however, I grew less timid, and began to feel more at home on the wide water. Then I extended my excursions sometimes as far as a mile from the shore, and thought nothing of it. My friend, the waterman, seeing me on one of these far voyages, repeated his former caution, but it might have had a more salutary effect had I not overheard him, the moment after, observe to one of his companions :—

‘Wonderful boy! ain’t he, Bob? Come of the true stock—make the right sort of a sailor, if ever he grows big enough.’

This remark led me to think that I had not much displeased my patron in what I had done; and therefore his caution ‘to keep close in-shore’ produced very little effect on me.

It was not a long time before I quite disobeyed it; and the disobedience, as you shall hear, very nigh cost me my life.

But first let me tell of a circumstance that occurred at this date, and which quite changed the current of my existence. It was a great misfortune that befell me—the loss of both my parents.

I have said that my father was a seaman by profession. He was the master of a ship that traded, I believe, to the colonies of America, and so little was he at home from the time I was old enough to remember, that I scarce recollected him more than just what he was like—and that was a fine, manly, sailor-looking man, with a face bronzed by the weather until it was nearly of a copper colour, but for all that a handsome and cheerful face.

My mother must have thought so too, for from the time that news arrived that his ship was wrecked and he himself drowned, she was never herself again. She seemed to pine away, as if she did not wish to live longer, but was desirous of joining him in the other world. If such were her wishes, it was not long before they were gratified; for in a very few weeks after the terrible news had reached us, my poor mother was carried to her grave.

These were the circumstances that changed the current of my existence. Even my mode of life was no longer the same. I was now an orphan, without means and without a home; for, as my parents had been without any fortune, and subsisted entirely upon the hard earnings of my father’s trade, no pro-

vision had been made against such an unexpected event as my brave father's death, and even my mother had been left almost penniless. Perhaps it was a merciful providence that called her away from a world that to her was no longer a place of enjoyment; and although I long lamented my dear kind mother, in after years I could not help thinking that it was her happier destiny that at that time she had been summoned away. Long, long years it was before I could have done anything to aid or protect her—during the chill cold winter of poverty that must have been her portion.

To me the events brought consequences of the most serious kind. I found a home, it is true, but a very different one from that to which I had all along been used. I was taken to live with an uncle, who, although my mother's own brother, had none of her tender or affectionate feelings; on the contrary, he was a man of morose disposition and coarse habits, and I soon found that I was but little more cared for than any one of his servants, for I was treated just as they.

My school-days were at an end, for I was no more sent to school from the day I entered my uncle's house. Not that I was allowed to go about idle. My uncle was a farmer, and soon found a use for me; so that between running after pigs and cattle, and driving the plough horses, or tending upon a flock of sheep, or feeding calves, or a hundred other little matters, I was kept busy from sunrise till sunset of every day in the week. Upon Sundays only was I permitted to rest—not that my uncle was at all religious, but that it was a custom of the place that there should be no work done on the Sabbath. This custom was strictly observed by everybody belonging to the village, and my uncle was compelled to follow the common rule; otherwise, I believe, he would have made Sunday a day of work as well as any other.

My uncle, not having any care for religion, I was not sent to church, but was left free to wander idle about the fields, or indeed wherever I chose to go. You may be sure I did not choose to stop among the hedges and ditches. The blue sea that lay beyond, had far more attractions for me than birds-nesting, or any other rural amusement ; and the moment I could escape from the house I was off to my favourite element, either to accompany my friend, Harry Blew, in some of his boating trips, or to get possession of the 'dingy', and have a row on my own account. Thus, then, were my Sundays passed.

While my mother was living, I had been taught to regard this idle way of spending Sunday as sinful ; but the example which I had before me in my uncle's life, soon led me to form other ideas upon this matter, and I came to regard the Lord's Day as only differing from any other of the week in its being by far the pleasantest.

One Sunday, however, proved anything but pleasant. So far from it, that it came very near being the most painful as well as the *last* day of my life—which was once more imperilled by my favourite element—the water.

CHAPTER V

THE REEF

It was Sunday morning, and as fine a one as I can remember. It was in the month of May, and not likely to be otherwise than fine. The sun was shining brightly, and the birds filled the air with joyous music. The thrush and blackbird mingled their strong vigorous voices, with the mellowed trilling of the skylark, and over the fields could be heard almost continuously the call of the cuckoo—now here, now there, as the active creature plied her restless wing from one hedge-tree to another. There was a strong sweet perfume in the air like the scent of almonds, for the white thorn was now expanding its umbels of aromatic flowers, and there was just enough breeze to bear their fragrance throughout the whole atmosphere. The country, with its green hedgerows, its broad fields of young corn, its meadows enamelled with the golden ranunculus and the purple spring orchis both in full flower; the country with its birds' nests and bird music would have been attractive to most boys of my age, but far more fascination for me was there in that which lay beyond—that calm, glassy surface of a sky-blue colour that shone over the fields, glistening under the rays of the sun like a transparent mirror. That great watery plain was the field upon which I longed to disport myself: far lovelier in my eyes than the rigs of waving corn, or the flower-enamelled mead, its soft ripple more musical to my ear than the songs of thrush or

skylark, and even its peculiar smell more grateful to my senses than the perfume of buttercups and roses.

As soon, therefore, as I left my chamber and looked forth upon this smiling, shining sea, I longed to fling myself on its bosom with a yearning which I cannot express. To satisfy this desire, I made all haste to be gone. I did not even wait for a regular breakfast, but was content with a piece of bread and a bowl of milk, which I obtained from the pantry, and having hurriedly swallowed these, I struck out for the beach.

I rather stole away than otherwise, for I had apprehensions that some obstacle might arise to hinder me from gratifying my wishes. Perhaps my uncle might find reason to call me back, and order me to remain about the house; for although he did not object to my roaming idly about the fields, I knew that he did not like the idea of my going upon the water, and once or twice already had forbidden it.

This apprehension, then, caused me to use a little precaution. Instead of going out by the avenue leading direct from the house to the main road that ran along the shore, I went by a back way that would bring me to the beach in a circuitous direction.

I met with no interruption, but succeeded in reaching the water edge without being observed—by any one who had an interest in knowing where I went.

On arriving at the little cove where the young waterman kept his boats, I perceived that the larger one was out, but the dingy was there at my service. This was just what I wished for, as on that particular day I had formed a design to make a very grand excursion in the little boat. My first act, then, was to get inside and bale out the water which had gathered in the bottom of the dingy. There was a good deal of water in her, and I concluded from this that she must have lain several days without being used, for she was a craft that did not leak very fast. Fortun-

ately, I found an old tin pan, that was kept on purpose to bale out with, and after scooping away for some ten minutes or a quarter of an hour, I got the little boat dry enough for my purpose. The oars were kept in a shed behind the cottage of the waterman, which stood only a short distance back upon the beach : and these I fetched, as I had often done before, without the necessity of asking leave from any one.

I now entered the dingy, and having adjusted the thole pins and placed my oars on the rowlocks, I took my seat and pushed off from the shore. My little skiff yielded freely to my stroke, and shot out into the deep water as smoothly as if she had been a fish ; and with a heart as light as ever beat in my breast, I pulled away over the bright blue sea. The sea was not only bright and blue, but as calm as a lake. There was hardly so much as a ripple, and so clear was it underneath, I could see the fishes at play down to a depth of several fathoms.

The bed of the sea in our bay is of pure sand of a silvery whiteness ; and the smallest objects, even little crabs not so big as a crown piece, could be distinctly seen gamboling along the bottom, in playful pursuit of one another, or in search of some creatures still smaller than themselves, of which they designed to make their breakfast. I could see 'schools' of small herring fry and broad round plaice, and huge turbot, and beautiful green mackerel, and great conger eels as large as boa constrictors, all engaged in pursuits of pleasure or prey.

It was one of those mornings when the sea is perfectly still, and such as are very rare upon our coasts. It was just the morning for me, for, as I have already said, I had designed a 'grand excursion' for the day, and the weather would enable me to carry my design into execution.

You will ask whither was I going ? Listen, and you shall hear.

About three miles from the shore, and just visible from it, lay a small islet. It is not exactly correct to say islet. It was but a shoal of rocks—a small patch, apparently about a square pole in dimensions, and rising only a few inches above the surface of the water. This, too, only when the tide was out, for at all other times it was quite covered with the waves ; and then there could only be seen a slender staff sticking up out of the water to the height of a few feet, and at the head of this appeared a sort of knob, or lump. Of course the staff had been placed there to point out the shoal in times of high tide, so that the sloops and other small vessels that traded up the bay might not run upon it by mistake, and so get wrecked.

Only when the tide was low, then, was this little islet to be observed from the shore. Usually, it appeared of a jet black colour ; but there were other times when it was as white as if covered a foot deep with snow, and then it showed plainer and more attractive. I knew very well what caused this singular metamorphosis in its colour. I knew that the white mantle that covered it was neither more nor less than a vast flock of beautiful sea-fowl, that had settled upon the rocks, either to rest themselves after so much flying, or to search for such small fish or crustacea as might be left there by the tide.

Now this little spot had long been to me a place of first-rate interest, partly on account of its remote and isolated situation ; but more, I fancy, on account of these very birds, for in no other part of the bay had I seen so many of them together. It seemed also to be a favourite place with them ; for at the going out of every tide, I observed them gather from all directions, hover around the staff, and then settle down upon the black rocks around it, until the latter were hidden from the view behind the white bodies of the birds. These birds were gulls ; but there

appeared to be several kinds of them ; large ones and small ones, and at different times I had noticed birds of other kinds, such as the great terns and grebes, preening themselves in the same neighbourhood. Of course, from the shore the view one could have of these creatures was a very distant one, and it was difficult to tell to what species they belonged. The largest of them appeared not much bigger than sparrows, and had they not been on the wing, or so many of them together, they might have moved about unnoticed by any one passing along the shore.

I think it was the presence of these birds that had made this remote spot so interesting to me. At a very early age I was fond of all objects of natural history, but particularly of the creatures that have wings, and I believe there are few boys that are not so. There may be sciences and studies of greater importance to mankind, but there is none more refining to the taste or more fascinating to the youthful fancy than the study of nature. Whether it was to get a good look at the birds, or whether from some curiosity about other things I might see upon this little islet, I often wished that I could get to it. Never did I turn my eyes in that direction—and I did so as often as I came near the beach—without feeling a strong wish to get there and explore it from end to end. I knew in my memory the exact shape of it when the tide was lowest, and could at any time have chalked out its profile without looking at it. It was lower at both ends, and rose with a sort of curve towards the middle, like a huge black whale lying along the surface, and the staff, rising from the highest point, looked like a harpoon that was sticking in his back.

That staff, too, I longed to get my hands upon ; to see what it was made out of ; how high it really was if one were near it, for it only looked about a yard high from the shore ; what sort of a thing the knob was on the top, and how the butt was fastened

in the ground. Firmly it must have been set ; for I had often seen the waves wash up to it during great storms, and the spray driving so high above it, that neither rock, nor staff, nor knob were at all visible.

Ah ! many a time had I sighed to visit that attractive spot ; but never yet had the opportunity occurred. It was by far too distant for any excursion I had hitherto dared to make—far too dangerous a flight for me to take in the little dingy ; and no one had offered to go with me. Harry Blew had once promised me he would take me—at the same time, he laughed at the desire I expressed to visit such a place. What was it to him ? He had often rowed past it and around it, and no doubt landed upon it, and perhaps tied his boat to the staff, while he shot the sea-birds, or fished in the waters beside it ; but it had never been my good fortune to accompany him in one of these pleasant excursions. I had been in expectation, however, of doing so ; but now these hopes were gone. I could no more get away except on the Sundays ; and on these very days my friend was always engaged in his own occupation—for Sundays, above all other days of the week, was the time for sailing parties.

For a long time, then, I had waited in vain ; but I now resolved to wait no longer. I had made a bold determination on that very morning ; which was, that I should take the dingy and visit the reef myself. This, then, was the grand excursion on which I was bound, when I removed the little boat from her fastenings, and shot out upon the bosom of the bright blue sea.

CHAPTER VI

THE GULLS

I HAVE styled my determination a bold one. True, there was nothing remarkable in the enterprise itself. I only mean that it was bold for one so young and so little as I was at the time. Three miles rowing would be a good long pull, and that right out into the great deep water almost beyond sight of the shore ! I had never been so far before, nor half so far, neither ; in fact, never more than a mile from the beach, and in pretty shallow water, too—I mean, while by myself. With Blew I had been everywhere around the bay ; but then, of course, I had nothing to do with the management of the boat ; and, trusting to the skill of the young waterman, had no cause to feel afraid. Alone, the case was different. Everything depended upon myself ; and should any accident arise, I should have no one to give me either counsel or assistance. Indeed, before I had got quite a mile from the shore, I began to reflect that my enterprise was not only a bold but a *rash* one, and very little would have induced me to turn round and pull back.

It occurred to me, however, that some one might have been watching me from the shore ; some boy who was jealous of my prowess as an oarsman—and there were such in our village—and this boy or boys would have seen that I had started for the islet, would easily have divined my reasons for turning back, and would not fail to ‘twit’ me with cowardice. Partly influenced by this thought, and partly because I still

had a desire to proceed, I plucked up fresh spirit and rowed on.

When I had got within about half a mile of the shoal, I rested upon my oars, and looked behind me, for in that direction lay the goal I was struggling to reach. I perceived at a glance that the little islet was quite out of the water, as if the tide was at its lowest ; but the black stones were not visible on account of the birds that were standing or sitting all over them. It looked as if a flock of swans or white geese were resting upon the shoal ; but I knew they were only large gulls, for many of the same kind were wheeling about in the air—some settling down and some rising to take a fresh flight. Even at the distance of half a mile, I could hear their screaming quite distinctly, and I had heard it much further off, so calm was the atmosphere.

I was now the more anxious to proceed on account of the presence of the birds, for I was desirous of getting near them and having a good view of them. I intended to stop again before going too close, in order to watch the movements of these pretty creatures ; for many of them were in motion over the shoal, and I could not divine what they were about.

In hopes that they would let me approach near enough to observe them, I rowed gently and silently, dipping the blades of my oars as carefully as a cat would set down her paws.

When I had reached within some two hundred yards of them, I once more lifted the oars above water, and twisted my neck round to look at the birds. I observed that I had not yet alarmed them. Though gulls are rather shy birds, they know pretty well the range of a common fowling-piece, and will rarely trouble themselves to stir from the spot where they are seated until one is just getting within shooting distance. I had no gun, and therefore they had nothing to fear—not much, indeed, even had I pos-

sessed one, as I should not have known how to use it. It is probable enough that had they seen a gun they would not have allowed me so near, for white gulls somewhat resemble black crows in this respect, and can distinguish between a gun and hoe-handle a long way off. Right well do they know the glance of a 'shooting-iron'.

I watched the creatures for a long while with great interest; and would have considered myself well rewarded for the exertions I had made in getting there, had I even turned back on the spot and rowed ashore again. The birds that clustered near the stones were all gulls, but there were two kinds, very different in size, and somewhat unlike in colour. One sort had black heads and grayish wings, while the other and larger kind was nearly of a pure white colour. Nothing could exceed the cleanly appearance of both. They looked as if a spot of dirt had never soiled their snowy plumage; and their beautiful red legs shone like branches of the purest coral. I made out that those upon the stones were engaged in various ways. Some ran about evidently in search of food; and this consisted of the small fry of fish that had been left by the receding tide, as well as little crabs, shrimps, lobsters, mussels, and other curious animals of the sea. A great many of the birds merely sat preening their white plumage, of which they appeared to be not a little proud. But although they all looked contented and happy, they were evidently not exempted, any more than other living creatures, from cares and evil passions. This was proved by the fact that more than one terrible quarrel occurred among them while I was looking on, from what cause—unless it was the male birds battling through jealousy—I could not determine. A most captivating sight it was to see those upon the wing engaged in their occupation of fishing; to see them shoot down from a height of more than a hundred yards, disappear with almost silent plunge be-

neath the blue waves, and after a short interval emerge, bearing their glittering prey in their beaks. Of all the movements of birds, either upon foot or on the wing, I think there is none so interesting to look at as the actions of the fishing gull while engaged in pursuit of his prey. Even the kite is not more graceful in its flight. The sudden turning in his onward course—the momentary pause to fix more accurately the position of his prey—the arrow-like descent—the plunge—the white spray dancing upward, and then the hiatus occasioned by the total disappearance of the winged thunderbolt, until the white object starts forth again above the blue surface—all these points are incomparable to behold. No ingenuity of man, aided by all the elements of air, water, or fire, can produce an exhibition with so fine an effect.

For a good long while I sat in my little boat watching the movements of the gulls; and then, satisfied that I had not made the excursion in vain, I turned myself to carrying out my original design, and landing upon the reef.

The pretty birds kept their places until I had got nearly up to its edge. They seemed to know that I intended them no harm, and did not mistrust me. At all events, they had no fear of a gun, for when they at length arose they winged their way directly over my head, so near that I could almost have struck them down with the oar.

One, that I thought was larger than any of the flock, had been all the time perched in a conspicuous place—on the top of the signal-staff. Perhaps I only fancied him larger on account of the position in which he was placed; but I noticed that before any of the others took to flight, he had shot upward with a screech, as if it were a command for the rest to follow example. Very likely he was either the sentinel or leader of the flock; and this little bit of tactics was no other than I had often seen practised by a flock

of crows, when engaged on a pillaging expedition in a field of beans or potatoes.

The departure of the birds appeared to produce a darkening effect upon my spirits. The very sea seemed blacker after they had gone ; but this was natural enough, for instead of their white plumage that had filled my eyes, I now looked upon the desolate reef, covered over with loose stones that were as black as if coated with tar. This was only partly what had brought about the change in my feelings. There was another cause. A slight breeze had sprung up, as a cloud passed suddenly over the sun's disc ; and the surface of the water, hitherto smooth and glassy, had grown all at once of a grayish hue by the curling of the little waves.

The reef had a forbidding aspect ; but determined to *explore* it—since I had come so far for that especial purpose—I rowed on till the keel of the dingy grated upon the rocks.

A little cove presented itself to my view, which I thought would answer my purpose ; and heading my prow up into it, I stepped out, and took my way direct towards the staff—that object which for so many years I had looked upon from afar, and with which I had longed to be more intimately acquainted.

CHAPTER VII

SEARCH FOR A SEA-URCHIN

I SOON touched with my hands the interesting piece of wood, and felt as proud at that moment as if it had been the North Pole itself, and I its discoverer. I was not a little surprised at its dimensions, and how much the distance had hitherto deceived me. Viewed from the shore, it looked no bigger than the shaft of a hoe or a hay-fork, and the knob at the top about equal to a fair-sized turnip. No wonder I was a bit astonished to find the staff as thick, and thicker, than my thigh, and the top full larger than my whole body! In fact, it was neither more nor less than a barrel or cask of nine gallons. It was set upon end, the top of the staff being wedged into a hole in the bottom, thus holding it firmly. It was painted white, though this I knew before, for often had I viewed it glistening under the sun, while the shaft below was a dark colour. It may have been black at one time, and had grown discoloured by the weather and the spray of the stormy water, that often lashed all around it, even up to the barrel at the top.

Its height, too, I had miscalculated as much as its thickness. From the land it appeared no taller than an ordinary man; but looking up to it from the shoal, it towered above me like the mast of a sloop. It could not have been less than twelve feet—yes, twelve it was at the very least.

I was equally surprised at the extent of ground that I found above water. I had long fancied that my

islet was only a pole or so in size, but I now perceived it was a hundred times that—an acre, or very near. Most of the surface was covered with loose rocks, or ‘boulders’, from the size of small pebbles to pieces as big as a man’s body, and there were other rocks still larger, but these I perceived were not loose, but half buried, and fast as rocks could be. They were only the projecting ends of great masses that formed the strength of the reef. All, both large ones and small ones, were coated over with a black, slimy substance, and here and there great beds of seaweed, of different kinds, among which I recognized some sorts that were usually cast up on our beach, and passed by the name of ‘sea-wreck’. With these I had already formed a most intimate acquaintance, for more than one hard day’s work had I done in helping to spread them over my uncle’s land, where they were used as manure for potatoes.

After having satisfied myself with a survey of the tall signal-staff, and guessed at the dimensions of the barrel at the top, I turned away from it, and commenced wandering over the reef. This I did to see if I could find some curious shell or other object that would be worth carrying back with me—something to keep as a memento of this great and hitherto pleasant excursion.

It was not such an easy matter getting about ; more difficult than I had imagined. I have said the stones were coated over with a slimy substance, and this made them slippery too. Had they been well soaped, they could not have been smoother to the tread ; and before I had proceeded very far, I got a tolerably ugly fall, and several severe scrambles.

I hesitated as to whether I should go farther in that direction, which was to the opposite side from where I had left the boat ; but there was a sort of peninsula jutting out from the main part of the reef ; and near the end of this I saw what I fancied to be

a collection of rare shells, and I was now desirous of possessing some. With this view, then, I kept on.

I had already observed several sorts of shells among the sand that lay between the boulders, some with fish in them, and others opened and bleached. None of these kinds were new to me, for I had seen them all many a time before—even in the potato-field, where they turned up among the wreck. They were only blue mussels, and a sort the farm people called ‘razors’, and ‘whelks’, and common ‘cockle-shells’. I saw no oysters, and I regretted this, for I had grown hungry and could have eaten a dozen or two; but it was not the ground for these. Plenty of little crabs and lobsters there were, but these I did not fancy to eat unless I could have boiled them, and that of course was not possible under the circumstances.

On my way to the front of the peninsula, I looked for ‘sea-urchin’, but none fell in my way. I had often wished to get a good specimen of this curious shell, but without success. Some of them turned up now and then upon the beach near our village, but they were not allowed to lie long. As they made a pretty ornament for the mantel-shelf, and were rare upon our coast, it was natural they should be prized above the common kinds, and such was in reality the case. This reef being remote, and being seldom visited by any of the boatmen, I was in hopes I should find some upon it, and I was determined to look narrowly for one. With this view I sauntered slowly along, examining every crevice among the rocks, and every water hole that lay within eyeshot of my path.

I had great hopes that I should find something rare upon the peninsula. The glittering forms that had first induced me to turn my steps in that direction, seemed to gleam still brighter as I drew near. For all that, I did not particularly hasten. I had no fear that the shells would walk off into the water. These were houses whose tenants had long since deserted them,

and I knew they would keep their place till I got up ; so, under this impression, I continued to go deliberately, searching as I went. I found nothing to my mind until I had reached the peninsula ; but then indeed a beautiful object came under my eyes. It was of a dark red colour, round as an orange, and far bigger ; but I need not describe what I saw, since every one of you must have seen and admired the shell of the sea-urchin.

It was not long before I held it in my hand, and admiring its fine curving outlines, and the curious protuberances that covered them. It was one of the handsomest I had ever seen, and I congratulated myself upon the pretty *souvenir* it would make of my trip.

For some minutes I kept looking at it, turning it over and over, and peeping into its empty inside—into the smooth white chamber that its tenant had long since evacuated. Yes, some minutes passed before I tired of this manipulation ; but at length I remembered the other shells I had noticed, and strode forward to gather them.

Sure enough they were strangers, and fair strangers too. They were of three or four sorts, all new to me ; and on this account I filled my pockets with them, and after that both my hands, and then turned round with the intention of going back to the boat.

Gracious heaven ! what did I see ? A sight that caused me to drop my shells, sea-urchin and all, as if they had been pieces of red-hot iron. I dropped them at my feet, and was nigh to falling on top of them, so greatly was I astonished at what I saw. What was it ? *My boat ! my boat ! Where was my boat ?*

CHAPTER VIII

LOSS OF THE DINGY

It was the boat, then, that had caused me this sudden surprise, or rather alarm, for it speedily came to this. What, you will ask, had happened to the boat? Had she gone to the bottom? Not that; but, what at first appeared almost as bad for me—*she had gone away!*

When I turned my eyes in the direction I expected to see her, she was not there! The little cove among the rocks was empty.

There was no mystery about the thing. At a glance I comprehended all, since at a glance I saw the boat herself, drifting away outward from the reef. No mystery at all. I had neglected to make the boat fast, had not even taken the rope-hawser ashore; and the breeze, which I now observed had grown fresher, catching upon the sides of the boat, had drifted her out of the cove, and off into the open water.

My first feeling was simply surprise; but in a second or two, this gave way to one of alarm. How was I to recover the boat? How to get her back to the reef? If not successful in this, how then should I reach the shore? Three miles was the shortest distance. I could not swim it even for my life; and I had no hope that any one would come to my rescue. It was not likely that any one upon the shore could see me, or be aware of my situation. Even the little boat would hardly be seen, for I was now aware of how much smaller objects would be rendered at that

great distance. The signal staff had taught me this fact, as well as the reef itself. Rocks that, from the shore, appeared to rise only a foot above the surface, were actually more than a yard. The boat, therefore, would hardly be visible, and neither I nor my perilous situation would be noticed by any one on the shore, unless, indeed, some one might chance to be looking through a glass ; but what probability was there of such a thing ? None whatever, or the least in the world.

Reflection only increased my uneasiness ; for the more I reflected the more certain did it appear to me, that my negligence had placed me in a perilous situation.

For a while my mind was in a state of confusion, and I could not decide upon what course to follow. There was but little choice left me—in fact, I saw no alternative at all—but remain upon the reef. Upon second thoughts, however, an alternative did suggest itself, if I could but succeed in following it. That was to swim out after the boat, and endeavour to regain possession of her. She had not drifted so far away but that I might reach her by swimming. A hundred yards or so she had got from the edge of the islet, but she was still widening the distance between us, and would soon be much farther off.

It was plain, then, that if I intended to take this course, no time was to be lost—not a moment.

What else could I do ? If I did not succeed in reaching her, I might set myself down for a troublesome adventure, perhaps perilous too ; and this belief nerved me to the attempt.

With all the speed I could make, I stripped off my clothes and flung them upon the rocks. My shoes and stockings followed—even my shirt was thrown aside, lest it might encumber me, and just as if I was going in to have a bathe and a swim, I launched myself upon the water. I had no wading to do. The

water was beyond my depth from the very edge of the reef, and I had to swim from the first plunge. Of course, I struck out directly for the boat, and kept on without turning to one side or the other.

I swam as swiftly as I could, but it was a long while before I could perceive that I was coming any nearer to the dingy. At times, I thought I was not gaining upon her at all, and when the thought occurred to me that she might be going as fast as I was, it filled me with vexation and alarm. Should I not succeed in coming up with her, then it would be a hopeless case indeed. I should have to turn round again and swim back to the reef, or else go to the bottom ; for, as already stated, I could no more have reached the shore by swimming than I could have swum across the Atlantic. Though I was now a very good swimmer, and might have done a mile on a pinch, three were far beyond my power, and I could not have made the distance to save my life. Moreover, the boat was not drifting in the direction of the shore, but up the bay, where there was at least ten miles of water before me.

I was getting discouraged in this pursuit, and thought of turning back to the reef, before I might become too exhausted to reach it, when I noticed that the dingy veered slightly round, and then drifted in a direction oblique to that she had already taken. This arose from a sudden puff of wind which blew from a new quarter. It brought the boat nearer me, and I resolved to make one more effort to reach her.

In this, I at length succeeded ; and in a few minutes more, had the satisfaction of laying my hands upon the gunwale of the boat, which enabled me to obtain a little rest after my long swim.

As soon as I had recovered breath, I attempted to climb in over the side ; but to my chagrin, the crank little craft sunk under my weight, and turned bottom upwards, as if it had been a washing tub, plunging me under water by the sudden capsize. I rose to the

surface, and once more laying my hands upon the boat, climbed up to get astride across the keel ; but in this I was also unsuccessful, for losing my balance, I drew the boat so much to one side, that she righted again mouth upwards. This was what I should have desired ; but I perceived to my alarm that she was nearly full of water, which she had shipped in turning over. The weight of the water steadied her, so that I was able to draw myself over the gunwale without further difficulty, and got safe enough inside ; but I had not been there a second, till I perceived that the boat was *sinking* ! My additional weight was the cause of this, and I saw at once that unless I leaped out again, she would speedily go to the bottom. Perhaps if I had preserved my presence of mind and leaped out again, the boat might still have kept afloat. But what with my fears, and the confusion consequent upon the various duckings I had had, my presence of mind was gone, and I remained standing in the boat up to my knees in the water. I thought of baling her out, but I could find no vessel. The tin pan had disappeared, as well as the oars. The former no doubt had sunk as the boat capsized, and the oars were floating on the water at a great distance off.

In my despair, I commenced baling out the water with my hands ; but I had not made half-a-dozen strokes before I felt that she was going down. The next instant she had gone, sinking directly underneath me, and causing me to jump outwards in order to escape from being carried down in the vortex she had made.

I cast one glance upon the spot where she had disappeared. I saw that she was gone for ever ; and heading away from the spot, I swam back in the direction of the reef.

CHAPTER IX

THE SIGNAL-STAFF

I SUCCEEDED in reaching the reef, but not without a tough struggle. As I breasted the water, I felt that there was a current against me—the tide ; and this it was, as well as the breeze, that had been drifting the boat away. But I got back to the reef, and there was not a foot to spare. The stroke that brought me up to the edge of the rocks, would have been my last, had no rocks been there ; for it would have been the last I could give, so much was I exhausted. Fortunately, my strength had proved equal to the effort ; but that was now quite gone, and I lay for some minutes upon the edge of the reef, at the spot where I had crawled out, waiting to recover my breath.

I did not maintain this inactive attitude longer than was necessary. This was not a situation in which to trifle with time ; and knowing this, I got to my feet again to see if anything could be done.

Strange enough, I cast my eyes in the direction whence I had just come from the boat. It was rather a mechanical glance, and I scarce know why I should have looked in that particular direction. Perhaps I had some faint hope that the sunken craft might rise to the surface ; and I believe some such fancy actually did present itself. I was not permitted to indulge in it, for there was no boat to be seen, nor anything like one. I saw the oars floating far out, but only the oars ; and for all the service they could do me, they might as well have gone to the bottom, along with the boat.

I next turned my eyes toward the shore ; but nothing was to be seen in that direction, but the low-lying land upon which the village was situated. I could not see any people on shore—in fact, I could hardly distinguish the houses ; for, as if to add to the gloom and peril that surrounded me, the sky had become overcast, and along with the clouds a fresh breeze had sprung up.

This was raising the water into waves of considerable height, and these interfered with my view of the beach. Even in bright weather, the distance itself would have hindered me from distinguishing human forms on the shore ; for from the reef to the nearest suburb of the village, it was more than three statute miles.

Of course, it would have been of no avail to have cried out for assistance. Even on the calmest day I could not have been heard, and fully understanding this, I held my peace.

There was nothing in sight—neither ship, nor sloop, nor schooner, nor brig—not a boat upon the bay. It was Sunday, and vessels had kept in port. Fishing boats for the same reason were not abroad, and such pleasure boats as belonged to our village had all gone in their usual direction, down the bay, to a celebrated lighthouse there—most likely the boat of Harry Blew among the rest.

There was no sail in sight, either to the north, the south, the east, or the west. The bay appeared deserted, and I felt as much alone as if I had been shut up in my coffin.

I remembered instinctively the dread feeling of loneliness that came over me. I remember that I sank down upon the rocks and wept.

To add to my agony of mind, the sea birds, probably angry at me for having driven them away from their resting place and feeding ground, now returned ; and hovering over my head in a large flock, screamed in my ears as if they intended to deafen me. At times

one or another of them would swoop almost within reach of my hands ; and uttering their wild cries, shoot off again, to return next moment with like hideous screams. I began to be afraid that these wild birds might attack me, though I suppose, in their demonstrations they were merely actuated by some instinct of curiosity.

After considering every point that presented itself to my mind, I could think of no plan to pursue, other than to sit down (or stand up, if I liked it better), and wait till some succour should arrive. There was no other course left. Plainly, I could not get away from the islet of myself, and therefore I must needs stay till some one came to fetch me.

But when would that be ? It would be the merest chance if any one on shore should turn their eyes in the direction of the reef ; and even if they did, they would not recognize my presence there without the aid of a glass. One or two of the watermen had telescopes—this I knew—and Harry Blew had one ; but it was not every day that the men used these instruments, and ten chances to one against their pointing them to the reef. What would they be looking for in that direction ? No boats ever came or went that way, and vessels passing down or up the bay always gave the shoal a wide berth. My chances, therefore, of being seen from the shore, either with the naked eye or through a glass, were slender enough. But still more slender were the hopes I indulged that some boat or other craft might pass near enough for me to hail it. It was very unlikely, indeed, that any one would be coming in that direction.

It was with very disconsolate feelings, then, that I sat down upon the rock to await the result.

That I should have to remain there till I should be starved I did not anticipate. The prospect did not appear to me so bad as that, and yet such might have been the case, but for one circumstance, which I felt

confident would arise to prevent it. This was, that Harry Blew would *miss the dingy and make search for me.*

He might not, indeed, miss her before nightfall, because he might not return with his boating party before that time. As soon as night came, however, he would be certain to get home ; and then, finding the little boat away from her moorings, he would naturally suspect that I had taken her, for I was the only boy in the village, or man either, who was allowed this privilege. The boat being absent, then, and not even returning at night, Blew would most likely proceed to my uncle's house ; and then the alarm at my unusual absence would lead to a search for me ; which I supposed would soon guide them to my actual whereabouts.

Indeed, I was far less troubled about the danger I was in than about the damage I had done. How could I ever face my friend Blew again ? how make up for the loss of his boat ? This was a serious consideration. I had no money of my own, and would my uncle pay it for me ? I feared not ; and yet some one must remunerate the young waterman for the considerable loss I had occasioned him. But who was to do it, or how was it to be done ? If my uncle would only allow me to work for Harry, thought I, I might make it up to him in that way. I would be willing to work at so much a week, till the boat was paid for ; if he could only find something for me to do.

I was actually making calculations as to how I should make good the loss, and regarding that as my chief trouble at the moment. It had not yet occurred to me *that my life was in danger.* True, I anticipated a hungry night of it, and a bitter cold one too. I should be wet through and through, for I knew that when the tide returned, it would cover the stones of the reef, and I should have to stand all night in the water.

By the way, how deep would it be ? Up to my knees ?

I looked around to discover some means of judging how high the water was wont to rise. I knew that the rocks would be all covered, for I had often seen them so ; but I had been all my life under the impression, and so were people who lived on the shore, that the water rose only a few inches above the reef.

At first, I could observe nothing that would guide me as to the height, but at length my eye fell upon the signal-staff, and ran up and down its shaft. There was a water line sure enough, and there was even a circle of white paint round the post, no doubt intended to mark it ; but judge my surprise, my absolute terror, when I perceived that this line was at least *six feet above the base of the staff !*

Half distracted, I ran up to the pole. I placed myself by its side and looked up. Alas ! my eye had measured but too correctly. The line was far above my head. I could hardly touch it with the tips of my fingers !

A thrill of horror ran through my veins, as I contemplated the result of this discovery. The danger was too clearly defined. Before rescue could reach me, the tide would be in. I should be overwhelmed—swept from the reef—drowned in the waste of waters !

CHAPTER X

CLIMBING A SMOOTH POLE

My belief now was, that my life was in peril—nay, rather, that death was almost certain. My hopes of being rescued on that day were but slight from the first, but now they were slighter than ever. The tide would be back long before night. In a few hours it would be at its flood, and that would be the end. Should people go in search of me before night—which, for reasons already given, was not at all likely—they would be too late. The tide would not wait either for them or for me.

The mixed feeling of horror and despair that came over me, held me for a long time as if paralysed. I could not give consideration to anything, nor did I notice for some time what was going on around me. I only gazed upon the blank surface of the sea, at intervals turning from one side to the other, and helplessly regarding the waves. There was neither sail nor boat in sight ; nothing to relieve the dreary monotony, but here and there the white wings of the gulls, flapping about at their leisure. They no longer continued to annoy me with their screaming, though, now and then, an odd one would return and fly very near ; as if wondering what I was doing in such a place, and whether I did not mean to go away from it.

From this state of gloomy despair I was aroused by a gleam of hope. My eyes had fallen upon the signal-staff, the sight of which had so lately caused me a feeling of the opposite kind ; and then the

thought rushed into my mind that by means of this I might save myself.

I need hardly say that my design was to climb to its top, and there remain till the tide should go down again. One half the post, I knew, was above water-mark, even at high tide ; and on its top I should find safety.

It was only a question of climbing up the staff ; but that seemed easy enough. I was a good tree climber, and surely I could accomplish this.

The discovery of this place of refuge filled me with renewed hopes. Nothing could be easier than to get up ; I might have a hard night of it, staying up there, but there could be no danger. The peril was past : I should yet live to laugh at it.

Buoyed up with this belief, I once more approached the staff, with the intention of climbing up. I did not intend going up to remain. I thought it would be time enough when my footing failed me below ; it was only to make sure that I should be able to climb the pole when the hour of necessity arrived.

I found it more difficult than I had anticipated, especially in getting up the first six feet. This portion of the staff was coated over with some slimy substance—the same that covered the rocks around—and this rendered it as slippery as one of the greased poles that I had seen at merry-makings in our village.

It cost me several attempts and failures before I could get above the water-mark ; but the rest was more easy, and I soon reached the top of the staff.

I stretched my hand upward to seize hold of the barrel, and draw myself up upon it, congratulating myself that I had been able to accomplish my object, when a change came suddenly over my feelings, and I was once more plunged into despair.

My arm was too short to reach the upper rim of the cask. I could only touch the swell, scarce half way up.

I could get no hold upon it, either to stay me where I was, or to pull myself up farther.

I could not remain where I was. In a few seconds my strength gave way, and I was forced to slide down to the base of the staff.

I tried again, with no better success ; and then again, with a similar result. It was to no purpose. Stretch my arms as I would, and wriggle my limbs as I might, I could not get my body higher than the point where the staff was set, and could only extend my hand half way up the rounded swell of the cask. Of course I could not keep there, as there was nothing to rest my weight upon, and I was forced to glide back to the ground. .

It was with a feeling of renewed alarm, then, that I made this discovery, but I did not as before yield myself up to despair. Perhaps my wits were quickened by the peril that was fast approaching me. At all events, I kept my senses about me, and set to considering what was best to be done.

If I had only been in possession of a knife, I might have cut notches in the pole high up, and on these rested my feet ; but I had no knife—nothing to make notches with—unless I had eaten them out with my teeth. Verily I was in a difficult dilemma.

All at once, however, a bright thought came to my relief. Why might I not raise a resting-place from below ? Why not make a platform by building stones around the post, until they had reached above water-mark, and then stand upon these ? The very thing itself. A few stones, I had noticed already, were piled around the base, no doubt placed there to make the staff more firm. It would only be to bring up more stones, build them into a *cairn*, and then get on the top of them !

Delighted with this new project of safety, I lost not a moment in setting about carrying it into effect. There were plenty of loose boulders lying over the

reef, and I supposed that in a few minutes I could heap up enough of them to serve the purpose ; but I had not worked long before I perceived that the job would occupy me longer than I had anticipated. The stones were slippery, and this hindered me greatly in carrying them—some were too heavy for me, and others that I had supposed to be loose, I found to be half buried in sand, and held so fast that I could not draw them out.

Notwithstanding these impediments, I worked on with all the strength and energy I could command. I knew that in time I could raise the cairn as high as required, but time had now become the all-engrossing subject of my thoughts.

The tide had long since turned ; it was rising ; slowly and continuously it was lipping nearer and nearer—slowly but with certainty was it coming ; and I perceived all this !

I had many a fall, as I scrambled to and fro ; and my knees were bleeding from contact with the hard stones ; but these were not matters to grieve about, nor was it a time to give way to hardships, however painful to endure. A far greater hardship threatened—the loss of life itself—and I needed no urging to make me persevere with my work.

I had raised the pile up to the height of my head before the tide had yet risen over the rocks, but I knew that this would not be high enough. Two feet more was wanted to bring the top of my cairn on a level with high-water mark ; and to accomplish this I slaved away without thinking of a moment's rest. The work as it went on became more difficult. The loose stones that lay near had all been used, and I was obliged to go far out on the reef to procure others. This led to a great many severe falls, in which both my hands and knees were badly bruised ; besides, it prevented me from making rapid progress. There was another cause that delayed me. At the height of four

feet the pile was on a level with the crown of my head, and it was with difficulty I could place the stones higher up. Each one occupied me for minutes, and sometimes a heavy boulder which I had succeeded in getting up, would roll back again, endangering my limbs in its fall.

In fine, after labouring for a long time—two hours, or more—my work was brought to a termination. Not that it was done—far from it. Unfortunately, it was not terminated, but *interrupted*. What interrupted it I need hardly tell you, as you will guess that it was the *tide*. Yes, it was the tide, which, as soon as it had fairly begun to cover the stones, seemed to rush over them all at once. It did not recoil, as I have often seen it do upon the beach. There it flows in gradually, wave after wave; but upon the reef—the surface of which was nearly of equal height—the water, at the first rush, swept all over the rocks, and was soon of a considerable depth.

I did not leave off my exertions until long after the rocks were covered. I worked until I was knee deep in water, bending down to the surface, almost diving under it, detaching great stones from their bed, and carrying them in my arms towards the pile. I toiled away, with the spray spitting in my face, and sometimes great sheets of it breaking over my body, until I feared it would drown me—toiled on till the water grew so deep and the sea so strong, that I could not longer keep my footing upon the rocks; and then, half-wading, half-swimming, I brought my last stone to the heap, and hoisted it up. Climbing after, I stood upon the highest point of the battery I had erected, with my right arm closely hugging the shaft of the signal. In this attitude, and with trembling heart, I watched the inflow of the tide.

CHAPTER XI

THE RETURNING TIDE

To say that I awaited the result with confidence would not be at all true. Quite the contrary. Fear and trembling were far more the characteristics of my mind in that hour. Had I been allowed more time to build my cairn—time to have made it high enough to overtop the waves, and firm enough to resist them, I should have felt less apprehension. I had no fear that the signal-staff would give way. It had been well proved, for there had it stood defying the storm as long as I could remember. It was my newly-raised cairn that I dreaded, both its height and its durability. As to the former, I had succeeded in raising it five feet high, just within one foot of high-water mark. This would leave me to stand a foot deep in water, nor did I regard that in the light of a hardship. It was not on this account I had such uncomfortable imaginings. It was altogether a different thought that was vexing me. It was the doubt I entertained of the *faithfulness* of this water-mark. I knew that the white line indicated the height of the full tide under ordinary circumstances, and that when the sea was calm, the surface would coincide with the mark ; but only when it was dead calm. Now it was not calm at that moment. There was enough of breeze to have raised the waves at least a foot in height—perhaps two feet.— If so, then two-thirds, or even three-fourths, of my body would be under water—to say nothing of the spray which would be certain to drive around me. This, however,

was still far less than I had to fear. Supposing that the breeze should continue to freshen—supposing a storm should come on—nay, even an ordinary gale—then, indeed, the slight elevation which I had obtained above the surface would be of no avail; for during storms I had often observed the white spray lashing over that very reef, and rising many feet above the head of the signal-staff.

‘Oh! if a storm should arise, then am I lost indeed!’

Every now and then was I pained with such an apprehension.

True, the probabilities were in my favour. It was the fair month of May, and the morning of that day one of the finest I had ever seen. In any other month, a storm would have been more regular; but there are storms even in May, and weather that on shore may seem smiling and bright, is, for all that, windy and gusty upon the bosom of the broad sea, and causes destruction to many a fine ship. Moreover, it did not need to be a hurricane; far less than an ordinary gale would be sufficient to overwhelm me, or sweep me from the precarious footing upon which I stood.

Another apprehension troubled me: my cairn was far too loosely put together. I had not attempted to make any building of the thing; there was not time for that. The stones had been hurled or huddled on top of one another, just as they dropped out of my hands; and as I set my feet upon them I felt they were far from firm. What if they should not prove enough so to resist the current of the returning tide, or the lashing of the waves? Should they not, then indeed I had laboured in vain. Should they fall, I must fall with them, never again to rise!

No wonder that this added another to the many doubts I had to endure; and as I thought upon such a mischance occurring, I again looked eagerly outward, and ran my eyes in every direction over the

surface of the bay, only, as on every other occasion, to meet with sad disappointment.

For a long time I remained in the exact position I had first assumed—that is with my arm thrown round the signal-staff, and hugging it as if it were a dear friend. True, it was the only friend I had then ; but for it an attempt to have built the cairn would have been vain. Even could I have raised it to the full height, it is neither likely that it would have stood the water or that I could have held my position upon it. Without the staff to hold on to, I could not have balanced my body on its top.

This position, then, I kept, almost without moving a muscle of my body. I dreaded even to change my feet from one stone to another lest the movement might shake the pile and cause it to tumble down, and I knew that if once down, there would be no chance to build it up again. The time was past for that. The water all around the base of the staff was now beyond my depth. I could not have moved a step without swimming.

I passed most of the time in gazing over the water ; though I did not move my body, I kept constantly turning my neck. Now looking before, then behind, then to both sides, and the next moment repeating these observations, until I had scanned the surface for the fiftieth time, without sight of boat or ship to reward me. At intervals I watched the returning tide, and the huge waves as they rolled towards me over the reef, coming home from their far wanderings. They appeared angry, and growled at me as they passed, as if to chide and scold me for being there. What was I, weak mortal, doing in this their own peculiar home—this ground that was the chosen spot for their wild play ? I even fancied that they talked to me. I grew dizzy as I watched them, and felt as if I should swoon away and melt into their dark flood.

I saw them rising higher and higher, until they swept over the top of my cairn, and covered my feet.

resting on it ; higher still and yet higher, till I felt them lipping against my knees. O ! when will they stay ? When will they cease to come on ?

Not yet—not yet—higher ! higher ! till I stand up to the waist in the briny flood, and even above that the spray washes around me—against my face—over my shoulders—into my mouth, and eyes, and ears—half-stifling me, half-drowning me ! O merciful Father !

The water had reached its height, and I was almost overwhelmed by it ; but with desperate tenacity of life I held out, closely clinging to the signal-shaft. For a very long time I held on, and, had no change occurred, I might have been able to keep my place till the morning ; but a change was near, and one that placed me in greater peril than ever.

Night came on ; and, as if this had been a signal for my destruction, the wind increased almost to a gale. The clouds had been scowling throughout the twilight, as if threatening rain, which now fell in torrents—the wind, as it were, bringing the rain along with it. I perceived that the waves were every moment rising higher, and one or two large ones now swept almost over me. So great was their strength that I was scarcely able to resist it, and came very near being swept away.

I was now full of fear. I saw that should the breakers grow larger, I could not hold out against them, but must succumb. Even as they were, it was doubtful whether my strength would hold out.

The last great wave that struck me had somewhat altered my foothold upon the stones, and it was necessary for me to recover it, or fix myself still better. For this purpose I raised my body a little by my arms, and was feeling about with my foot for the most elevated point of my battery, when another huge wave came rushing along, and whipping both my feet off the stones, carried them out from the shaft. I held

on with both arms, and for some moments hung almost horizontally upon the water, until the wave had passed. Then permitting my feet to drop down, I felt once more for the support of the cairn. I touched the stones, but only touched them. As soon as a pound of my weight rested upon them, I felt the cairn crumbling beneath my feet, as if it had melted suddenly away ; and, no longer able to sustain myself, I glided down the staff, and sank after the scattered pile to the bottom of the sea !

CHAPTER XII

HUGGING THE STAFF

FORTUNATELY for me I had learnt to swim, and I was a tolerably good hand at it. It was the most useful accomplishment I could have possessed at that moment ; and but for it I should have been drowned on the instant. Diving, too, I could do a little at, else the ducking I then received would have discomfited me a good deal ; for I went quite to the bottom among the ugly black stones.

I stayed there not a moment longer than I could help, but mounted back to the surface like a duck ; and then, rising upon the wave, looked around me. My object in so doing was to get sight of the signal-staff, and with the spray driving in my eyes this was not so easy. Just like a water-dog searching for some object in the water, I had to turn twice or thrice before I saw it ; for I was uncertain in which direction to look for it, so completely had the sudden plunge blinded me and blunted my senses.

I got my eyes upon it at length ; not within reach, as might have been expected ; but many yards off, quite twenty, I should think ! Wind and tide had been busy with me ; and had I left them to themselves for ten minutes more, they would have carried me to a point from which I should never have been able to swim back.

As soon as I espied the post I struck directly for it—not indeed that I very clearly knew what I should do when I got there, but urged on with a sort of

instinct that something might interfere in my favour. I was acting just as men act when in danger of being drowned. I was catching at straws. I need not say that I was cool : you would not believe me, nor would there be a word of truth in it, for I was far from cool in the moral sense of the word, whatever I might be personally and physically. On the contrary, I was frightened nearly out of my senses ; and had just enough left to direct me back to the post, though this might only have been instinct. But no, something more than instinct ; for I had at the same time a keen and rational sense of the unpleasant fact, that when I should arrive at the post, I might be not a bit nearer to *safety*. I had no fear about being able to reach the staff. I had confidence enough in my natatory powers to make me easy on that score. It was only when I thought of the little help I should find there, that my apprehensions were keen, and this I was thinking of all the while I was in the water.

I could easily have climbed the staff as far as the cask, but no farther. To get to the top was beyond my power ; one of those difficulties which even the fear of death cannot overcome. I had tried it till I was tired of trying ; in short, till I saw I could not do it. Could I only have accomplished that feat, I might have done so before, for I took it for granted that on that high perch I should have been safe, and the nine-gallon barrel would have been large enough to have given me a seat where I might without difficulty have weathered the storm.

Another reason there was why it would have been the best place for me. Had I succeeded in mounting up there before nightfall, some one upon the shore might have noticed me, and then the adventure would have ended without all this peril. I even thought at the time of those things, and while clambering up the shaft entertained hopes that some one might observe me. I afterwards learned that some one

did—more than one—idlers along shore ; but not knowing who it was, and very naturally believing that some Sabbath-breaking boys had gone out to the reef to amuse themselves—part of that amusement being to ‘swarm’ up the signal-staff—I was set down as one of those, and no farther notice was taken of me.

I could not have continued to go up the staff. It speedily tired me out ; besides, as soon as I perceived the necessity for erecting the platform, I needed every second of the time that was left me for that work.

All the above thoughts did not pass through my mind while I was in the water struggling back to the staff, though some of them did. I thought of the impossibility of climbing up above the barrel—that was clear to me ; and I thought also of what I should do when I reached the post, and that was not clear to me. I should be able to lay hold upon the staff, as I had done before, but how I was to retain my hold was the unsolved problem. And it remained so, till I had got up and seized the staff, and indeed for a good while after.

Well, I reached the pole at length, after a great deal of buffetting, having the wind and tide, and even the rain in my teeth. But I reached it, and flung my arms around it as if it had been some dear old friend. Nor was it aught else. Had it not been for that brave stick, I might as well have stayed at the bottom.

Having clutched hold of it, I felt for some moments almost as if I had been saved. I experienced no great difficulty in keeping my limbs afloat so long as I had such a support for my arms, though the work was irksome enough.

Had the sea been perfectly calm I could have stood it for a long time ; perhaps till the tide had gone out again, and this would have been all I could have desired. But the sea was not calm, and that altered the case. There had been a short lull with the smoother sea just as I returned to the staff, and even this was a

fortunate circumstance, as it gave me time to rest and recover my breath.

Only a short respite it was, and then came wind and rain and rough seas—rougher than ever. I was first lifted up nearly to the barrel, and then let down again with a pitch, and then for some minutes was kept swinging about—the staff serving as a pivot—like some wonderful acrobat performing his feats in a gymnasium.

I withstood the first shock, and though it bowled me about, I held on manfully. I knew I was holding on for my life, and ‘needs must’; but I had slight reason to be satisfied. I felt how near it was to taking me, and I had gloomy forebodings about the result. Worse might come after, and I knew that a few struggles like this last would soon wear me out.

What, then, could I do that would enable me to hold on? In the interval between the great seas, this was my ruling thought. If I had only been possessed of a rope, I could have tied myself to the staff; but then a rope was as far away as a boat, or an easy chair by my uncle’s fireside. It was no use thinking of a rope, nor did I waste time in doing so; but just at that moment, as if some good spirit had put the idea into my head, I thought of something as good as a rope—a *substitute*. Yes, the very thing came up before my mind, as though Providence had guided me to think of it.

You are impatient to hear what it was. You shall hear.

Around my arms and shoulders I wore a garment familiarly known as a ‘cord jacket’—a roundabout of corduroy cloth, such as boys in the humbler ranks of life use to wear, or did when I was a boy. It was my every-day suit, and after my poor mother’s death it had come to be my Sunday wear as well. Let us say nothing to disparage this jacket. I have since then been generally a well-dressed man, and have

worn broadcloth of the finest that West of England looms could produce ; but all the wardrobe I ever had would not in one bundle weigh as much in my estimation as that corduroy jacket. I think I may say that I owe my life to it.

Well, the jacket chanced to have a good row of buttons upon it—not the common horn, or bone, or flimsy lead ones, such as are worn nowadays, but good, substantial metal buttons—as big as a shilling every way, and with strong iron eyes in them. Well was it for me they were so good and strong.

I had the jacket upon my person, and that, too, was a chance in my favour, for just as like I might not have had it on. When I started to overtake the boat, I had thrown off both jacket and trousers ; but on my return from that expedition, and before I had got as badly scared as I became afterwards, I had drawn my clothes on again. The air had turned rather chilly all of a sudden, and this it was that influenced me to re-robe myself. All a piece of good fortune, as you will presently perceive.

What use, then, did I make of the jacket ? Tear it up into strips, and with these tie myself to the staff ? No. That might have been done, but it would have been rather a difficult performance for a person swimming in a rough sea, and having but one hand free to make a knot with. It would even have been out of my power to have taken the jacket off my body, for the wet corduroy was clinging to my skin as if it had been glued there. I did not do this, then ; but I followed out a plan that served my purpose as well—perhaps better. I opened wide my jacket, laid my breast against the signal-staff, and, meeting the loose flaps on the other side, buttoned them from bottom to top.

Fortunately the jacket was wide enough to take in all. My uncle never did me a greater favour in his life—though I did not think so at the time—than

when he made me wear an ugly corduroy jacket that was 'miles too big' for me.

When the buttoning was finished, I had a moment to rest and reflect—the first for a long while.

So far as being washed away was concerned, I had no longer anything to fear. The post itself might go, but not without me, or I without it. From that time forward I was as much part of the signal-staff as the barrel at its top—indeed, more, I fancy—for a ship's hawser would not have bound me faster to it than did the flaps of that strong corduroy.

Had the keeping close to the signal-staff been all that was wanted I should have done well enough, but, alas ! I was not yet out of danger ; and it was not long ere I perceived that my situation was but little improved. Another vast breaker came rolling over the reef, and washed quite over me. In fact, I began to think that I was worse fixed than ever ; for in trying to fling myself upward as the wave rose, I found that my fastening impeded me, and hence the complete ducking that I received. When the wave passed on, I was still in my place ; but what advantage would this be ? I should soon be smothered by such repeated immersions. I should lose strength to hold up, and would then slide down to the bottom of the staff, and be drowned all the same—although it might be said that I had 'died by the standard !'

CHAPTER XIII

A STATE OF 'SUSPENSE'

I HAD not lost presence of mind as yet, but once more set about considering how I might be able to keep above water. I could easily slide up the staff without taking out a single button ; but once up, how could I remain there ? I should certainly come slipping down again. Oh ! that there was only a notch—a knot—a nail—if I only had a knife to make a nick ; but knot, notch, nail, knife, nick—all were alike denied me. Stay ! I was wrong, decidedly wrong. I remembered just then that while attempting to get over the barrel, I had noticed that the staff just under it was smaller than elsewhere. It had been flanged off at the top, as if to make a point upon it, and upon this point was placed the barrel, or rather a portion of the top was inserted into the end of the barrel.

I remembered this narrow part. It formed a sort of ring or collar round the post. Was it likely that the protuberance would be large enough to make a hold for my jacket, and prevent it from slipping back ? Likely or not, it was not the time to be nice about the choice of expedients. There was no choice : this or nothing.

Before another sea could reach me, I had 'swarmed' up the pole. I tried the experiment. It would not do. I came sliding down again, sadder than I had gone up ; and as soon as down, I was treated to 'another sorrow of the same'—a fresh sea that ducked and drowned me as before.

The cause of my failure was that I could not get the collar of my jacket high enough. My head was in the way.

Up the pole again with a new thought. A fresh hope had arisen in my mind, as soon as I rose out of the waves ; and this hope was that I might fasten something around the top, and to this something fasten myself.

But what was the something to be ? I had also thought of that ; and you shall hear what it was. I chanced to have upon my shoulders a pair of braces, and fortunately they were good ones—no pedlar's stuff, but stout braces of buckskin leather. This was the something by which I intended to hang myself up.

I lost no time in trying. I had no desire to stay longer below than I could help, and I soon 'speeled' up again. The jacket served a good purpose. It helped to stay me on the staff ; and by pressing my back outward, and holding well with my feet, I could remain a good while without getting tired.

Placing myself in this attitude, I unloosed my braces. I acted with caution, notwithstanding my disagreeable plight. I took care not to drop them while knotting the two together ; and I also took care to make the knot a firm one, as well as to waste only a very little of the precious length of the buckskin. I should need every inch of it.

Having got them both into one piece, I made a loop at the end, taking care that the post should be *inside* the loop. This done, I pushed the loop up till it was above the shoulder of the staff—right 'chuck' up to the barrel—and then I drew it tight and close. It remained only to pass the other end through my buttoned jacket, and knot it round the cloth. This I managed after a little, and then lying back, tried it with my whole weight. I even let go with my feet, and hung suspended for a moment or two ; and had

any pilot just then have seen me through his night-glass, he could have had but one belief—that suicide or some terrible crime had been committed.

Over-wearied, half-drowned was I, and I will not say whether or not I laughed at the odd attitude in which I had placed myself ; but I could have laughed, for from that moment I knew no further fear. I felt that I was delivered from death, as certainly as if I had seen Harry Blew and his boat rowing within ten yards of me. The storm might rage, rain fall, and wind blow ; spray might pitch over and around me ; but I was satisfied that I should be able to keep my position in spite of all.

True, it was far from being as comfortable as I might have wished it ; but now that the peril was past I began to consider how I could improve it. My feet gave me the most trouble. Every now and then my legs exhibited a tendency to get tired and let go their hold, and then I dropped back to my *hanging* attitude again.

This was unpleasant and somewhat dangerous, but I did not allow it to vex me long. There was a cure for this, like everything else, and I soon discovered it. I split up the legs of my pantaloons quite to the knees—as good luck would have it they were corduroy like the jacket—and then taking the two long pieces that hung down, I gave them a twist or two, passed them round the post, and knotted them together on the opposite side. This furnished a rest for the lower half of my body ; and thus, half sitting, half hanging, I passed the remainder of the night.

When I tell you that I saw the tide go out, and leave the rocks bare, you will think I surely released myself from my perch, and got down upon the reef. But I did nothing of the kind. I had no idea of trusting myself on those rocks again if I could help it.

I was not comfortable where I was, but still I could endure it for a while longer ; and I feared to make

any alteration in the premises lest I might have to use them again. Moreover, I knew that where I was I should very likely be seen from the shore as soon as the day broke, and then relief would be sure to be sent to me.

And it was sent, or came without any sending. Scarcely was the red Aurora above the water-line, when I perceived a boat making towards me with all speed ; and as soon as it drew near, I saw, what I had guessed long before, that it was Harry Blew himself that was handling the oars.

I shall not tell you how Harry acted when he came up ; how he laughed and shouted, and waved his oar-blade in the air ; and then how kindly and gently he lowered me down, and laid me in his boat ; and when I told him the whole story, and how his boat had gone to the bottom, instead of being angry with me, he only laughed, and said it was well it had been no worse ; and from that day not a syllable of reproach ever passed his lips—not a word about the lost dingy.

CHAPTER XIV

FOR PERU—TO-MORROW !

EVEN this narrow escape had no effect. I was not more afraid of the water than ever ; but *rather liked* it all the more on account of the very excitement which its dangers produced.

Very soon after I began to experience a longing to see foreign lands, and to travel over the great ocean itself. I never cast my eyes out upon the bay, that this yearning did not come over me ; and when I saw ships with their white sails, far off upon the horizon, I used to think how happy they must be who were on board of them ; and I would gladly have exchanged places with the hardest-working sailor among their crews.

Perhaps I might not have felt these longings so intensely had I been happy at home—that is, had I been living with a kind father and gentle mother ; but my morose old uncle took little interest in me ; and there being, therefore, no ties of filial affection to attach me to home, my longings had full play. I was compelled to do a good deal of work on the farm, and this was a sort of life for which I had no natural liking.

The drudgery only increased my desire to go abroad—to behold the wonderful scenes of which I had read in books, and of which I had received still more glowing accounts from sailors, who had once been fishermen in our village, and who occasionally returned to visit their native place. These used to tell

us of lions, and tigers, and elephants, and crocodiles, and monkeys as big as men, and snakes as long as ships' cables, until their exciting stories of the adventures they had experienced among such creatures filled me with an enthusiastic desire to see with my own eyes these rare animals, and to take part in the chasing and capturing of them as the sailors themselves had done. In short, I became very tired of the dull monotonous life which I was leading at home, and which I then supposed was peculiar to our own country ; for, according to our sailor-visitors, in every other part of the world there was full store of stirring adventures, and wild animals, and strange scenes.

One young fellow, I remember, who had only been as far as the Isle of Man, brought back such accounts of his adventures among blacks and boa-constrictors, that I quite envied him the exciting sports he had there witnessed. Though, for certain reasons, I had been well schooled in writing and arithmetic, yet I had but a slight knowledge of geography, as it was not a prominent branch of study in our school. I could scarce tell, therefore, where the Isle of Man lay ; but I resolved, the first opportunity that offered, that I should make a voyage to it, and see some of the wonderful sights of which the young fellow spoke.

Although this to me would have been a grand undertaking, yet I was not without hopes of being able to accomplish it. I knew that upon odd occasions a schooner traded from our port to this famed island, and I believed it possible, some time or other, to get a passage in her. It might not be so easy, but I was resolved to try what could be done. I had made up my mind to get on friendly terms with some of the sailors belonging to the schooner, and ask them to take me along with them on one of their trips.

While I was patiently waiting and watching for this opportunity an incident occurred that caused

me to form new resolutions and drove the schooner and three-legged island quite out of my head.

About five miles from our little village, and further down the bay, stood a large town. It was a real seaport, and big ships came there—great three-masted vessels, that traded to all parts of the world, and carried immense cargoes of merchandise.

One day I chanced to have been sent there, along with a farm servant of my uncle, who drove a cart full of farm produce which he was taking to the town for sale. I was sent to assist him, by holding the horse while he was engaged disposing of the contents of the cart.

It happened that the cart was drawn up near one of the wharves where the shipping lay, so that I had a fine opportunity of looking at the great leviathans of vessels moored along the quay, and admiring their tall slender masts and elegant rigging.

There was one ship directly opposite to us that particularly attracted my admiration. She was larger than any that was near, and her beautifully tapering masts rose higher by several feet than those of any other vessel in the port. But it was neither her superior size nor her more elegant proportions that fixed my attention so earnestly upon her, though these had at first attracted it. What rendered her so interesting in my eyes was the fact that she was about to sail very soon—upon the following day. This fact I learnt from a large board, which I saw fastened in a conspicuous place upon her rigging, and upon which I read the following :—

‘THE *INCA*—FOR PERU—TO-MORROW.’

My heart began to thump loudly against my ribs, as if some terrible danger was near, but it was only the emotion caused by the wild thoughts that rushed into my mind as I read the brief but stirring announcement—‘For Peru, *to-morrow*.’

Quick as lightning ran my reflections, all having their origin in the question, self-asked : why cannot I start 'for Peru, to-morrow' ?

Why not ?

There were grand impediments, and many of them ; I knew that, well enough. First, there was my uncle's servant, who was by my side, and whose duty it was to take me home again. Of course, it would have been preposterous to have asked his consent to my going.

Secondly, there was the consent of the people of the ship to be obtained. I was not so innocent as to be ignorant of the fact, that a passage to Peru, or to any other part of the world, was a thing that cost a great deal of money ; and that even little boys like myself would not be taken without paying.

As I had no money, or not so much as would have paid for a passage in a ferry-boat, of course this difficulty stared me in the face, very plainly. How was I to get passage ?

As I have said, my reflections ran as quick as lightning, and before I had gazed for a dozen minutes upon that beautiful ship, the impediments, both of the passage-money and the guardianship of the farmer's man, vanished from my thoughts ; and I had come to the determination, with full belief in being able to carry it out, that I *should* start for Peru to-morrow.

In what part of the world Peru lay, I knew no more than the man in the moon ; not near so much, since he has a good view of it on moonlight nights, and must know very well where it is. My school learning had extended no farther than to reading, writing, and arithmetic. In the last I was quite an adept, for our village teacher was rather clever at 'ciphering', and took great pride in proving his accomplishment, by communicating what he knew to his pupils. It was the leading branch of study

in his school. Geography, however, had been neglected, almost untaught ; and I knew not in what part of the world Peru lay, though I had heard that there was such a country.

The returned sailors already mentioned had spoken much about Peru—that it was a very hot country, and a very long way from England, a full six months' voyage. I had heard, moreover, that it was a country of wonderful gold mines, and blacks, and snakes, and palm-trees ; and this was enough for me. It was just the sort of place I desired to see. For Peru, then, was I bound, and in the good ship *Inca*.

My next reflection was how I should act—how get over the difficulty about the passage-money, and also escape from the guardianship of my friend ' John ', the driver of the cart. The former would appear the greater dilemma, though in reality it was no such thing ; at least, so I thought at the time. My reasons for thinking so were these : I had often heard of boys running away to sea—of their being accepted on board ships, and allowed to become boy-sailors and afterwards able seamen. I was under the impression that there was not much difficulty about the matter, and that almost any boy who was big enough and smart enough would be taken aboard, if he was but willing to work for it.

My only apprehension at the time was about my own bigness, or rather ' littleness ', for I knew that I was still but a very small shaver—smaller even than my age would indicate—though I had a well-knit frame, and was tolerably tight and tough. I had some doubt, however, about my size, for I was often ' twitted ' with being such a very little fellow. I was fearful, therefore, that this might be an obstacle to my being taken as a boy-sailor ; for I had really made up my mind to offer myself as such on board the *Inca*.

With regard to ' John ', my apprehensions were

very great. On the first impulse, I thought of no other plan than to give him the slip, and leave him to go home without me. After a little reflection, I perceived that that course would never do. John would be back in the morning with half-a-dozen of his kind—and perhaps my uncle himself—in quest of me. They would most likely arrive before the ship should sail, for vessels rarely take their departure at an early hour in the morning. The bellman would raise the hue and cry. The whole town would be traversed, and perhaps the ship searched, where, of course, I should be found, delivered up, carried home, and, beyond doubt, severely whipped ; for I knew my uncle's disposition well enough to believe that that would most certainly be the wind-up of the adventure. No, no, it would never do to let John and his cart go home without me.

A little reflection convinced me of this, and at the same time helped me to resolve upon a better plan. The new resolve was to go back along with my guardian John, and then take my departure from home itself.

Without imparting aught of my design, or making John in any way my confidant, I mounted into the cart along with him, and rode back to the village. I reached home as quietly, and apparently as little concerned about anything that was passing in my mind, as when I left it in the morning.

CHAPTER XV

RUNNING AWAY

It was near night when we arrived at the farm ; and I took care during the remainder of the evening to act as naturally as if there was nothing unusual in my thoughts. Little dreamt my relatives and the domestics of the farmhouse—little dreamt they of the big design that lay hid within my bosom, and which at intervals, when I reflected upon it, caused my heart to heave again.

There were moments when I half repented of my purpose. When I looked upon the familiar faces of home—for after all it was home—the only home I had—when I reflected that I might never see those faces again ; when I reflected that some of them might grieve for me—some I knew, *would* grieve—when I pondered upon the deception I was practising upon all of them, I in full possession of a design of which they knew nothing ; I say when these thoughts were in my mind, I half repented of my purpose. I would have given the world for a confidant, while thus wavering ; and no doubt, had I had one who would have advised me against going, I should have remained at home—at least, for that time—though, in the end, my wayward and aquatic nature would have carried me to sea all the same.

You will, no doubt, think it strange that under these circumstances I did not seek out Harry Blew, and take his advice. Ah ! that is just what I should have done, had Harry been within reach, but he was

not : the young waterman was a waterman no more. He had become tired of that sort of life months ago, had sold his boat, and gone off as a regular sailor *before the mast*. Perhaps if Harry Blew had been still at home, I should not have so much wished to go abroad ; but from the time that he left, I longed every day to follow his example ; and whenever I looked seaward over the bay, it was with a yearning that it would be impossible to explain. A prisoner, looking through the bars of his prison, could not have felt a greater longing to be free, than I to be away, far away, upon the bosom of the bright ocean. Had the young waterman only been there to counsel me, perhaps I might have acted differently ; but he, my best friend, was gone.

And now I had no confidant to whom I might impart my secret. There was one young fellow, a farm-servant, whom I thought I might have trusted. I was fond of him, and I believe I was a favourite with him as well. Twenty times I had it on my tongue's end to tell him of my intention, but as often I checked myself. I did not fear that he would betray me, provided I gave up my design of running away ; but I fancied he would advise me against it, and in the event of my persisting, *then* he might betray me. It would be of no use, therefore, seeking counsel from him, and I kept the design to myself.

I ate my supper, and went to bed as usual.

You will expect to hear that I got out of bed, and stole away in the night.

Not so. I kept my bed till the usual hour for rising, though I slept scarce a wink. The thought of my important purpose kept me awake, and during the few snatches of sleep I had, I dreamt of big ships and rolling seas, of climbing up tall masts, and dragging black, tarry ropes, till my fingers were in blisters.

I had at first partly made up my mind to take my departure in the night, which I could easily have

effected without danger of disturbing any one. There were no burglars in our quiet little village, nor had any been heard of for years, so that most people left their outside doors on the latch. The door of my uncle's house was on that night particularly free of egress, for, it being summer, and the weather extremely hot, it had been left 'on the jar'. I could have slipped out without causing it even to creak.

But though so very young, I was not without some powers of ratiocination; and I reasoned that if I ran away in the night, I should be missed at an early hour of the morning, and consequently sought for. The searchers, or some portion of them, would be pretty certain to follow me to the seaport town, and find me there as a matter of course. I should be in no better position than if I had given John the slip on the preceding day. Moreover, it was but five or six miles to the town—I should go over the ground in two hours at most—I should arrive too early, before the people of the ship would be stirring—the captain would be a-bed, and therefore I could not see him to offer myself as a volunteer in his service.

These were the considerations that induced me to remain at home until morning, although I waited impatiently for the hour.

I ate my breakfast along with the rest. Some one observed that I looked pale and 'out of sorts'. John attributed it to my journey of the preceding day, under the hot sun; and this explanation seemed to satisfy every one.

After breakfast I was afraid I should be ordered to some work—such as driving a horse, from which I might not easily get off—some one might be set to a task along with me, who might report me too soon if I should absent myself. Fortunately there was no work fit for me on that particular day, and I was not ordered about anything.

Taking advantage of this, I brought out my sloop,

which I was occasionally in the habit of amusing myself with during hours of leisure. There were other boys who had sloops, and schooners, and brigs, and we used to have races over the pond in the park. It was Saturday. There was no school on Saturday, and I knew that some of these boys would repair to the pond as soon as they had breakfasted, if not sooner. This would be a capital excuse for my going there; and with the sloop ostentatiously carried I passed through the farmyard, and walked in the direction of the park. I even entered the enclosure, and proceeded to the pond, where, as I had conjectured, I found several of my companions with their little ships going in full sail.

‘Oh’, thought I, ‘if I were to declare my intentions! what a stir it would make if the boys only knew what I was about to do with myself?’

I was welcomed by the boys, who seemed glad to see me once more among them. The reason of this was, that of late I had been kept almost constantly at work, and found but few occasions when I could join them at play, and I believe I had formerly been a play favourite with most of them.

But I remained among them only during the time in which the fleet made one voyage across the lake—a miniature regatta, in which my own sloop was conqueror—and taking the little vessel under my arm, I bade them good day, and left them.

They wondered at my going away so abruptly, but I found some excuse that satisfied them.

As I crossed the park wall, I glanced back upon the companions of my childhood, and the tears ran down my cheeks as I turned away from them for ever.

I crouched along the wall, and soon got into the high road that led from our village to the seaport town. I did not remain upon the road, but crossed it, and took into the fields on the opposite side. My object in doing this was to get under cover of some

woods that ran for a good distance nearly parallel to the direction of the road. Through these I intended to travel, as far as they would screen me from observation ; for I knew that if I kept on the road I should run the chance of being passed or met by some of the villagers, who would report having seen me, and thus guide the pursuit in the right direction. I could not guess at what hour the ship might weigh anchor, and therefore I could not make my time for absenting myself from the village. This had been the thought that troubled me all the morning. I feared to arrive too soon, lest the vessel might not sail until I should be missed, and people sent after me. On the other hand, I dreaded lest I might reach the port too late, and find the ship gone. This would have been a disappointment worse than to be taken back, and whipped for the attempt at running away—at least, so I should have considered it at the time.

I say, then, that this was the thought that had annoyed me all the morning, and still continued ~~to~~ do so ; for it no longer occurred to me that there was any danger of my being refused once I offered myself on the ship. I had even forgotten that I was so small a boy. The magnitude of my designs had magnified me, in my own estimation, to the dimensions of a man.

I reached the woods, and traversed them from end to end unseen. I met neither ranger nor game-keeper. When I had passed through the timber, I took into some fields ; but I was now at a good distance from the road, and I was less afraid of meeting any one who knew me. I could tell how far I was from the road, by keeping the sea in sight, for I knew that the former ran close to the beach.

The tall spires of the seaport town at length came in sight, and by these I was enabled to guide myself in the proper direction.

After crossing a great many drains and ditches,

and scrambling through numerous hedges—here and there making a bit upon private roads that ran in the right course—I arrived on the outskirts of the town. I made no pause there, but directing my steps among the houses, I soon found a street that led towards the quay. I saw the tall masts as I approached, and wildly beat my heart as my eyes rested upon the tallest of all, with its ensign drawn up to the main truck, and floating proudly in the breeze.

I took note of nothing more ; but, hurrying forward, I scrambled over the broad plank staging ; and having crossed the gangway, stood upon the deck of the *Inca*.

CHAPTER XVI

THE *INCA* AND HER CREW

ON crossing the gangway, I stopped near the main hatchway, where five or six sailors were busy with a large pile of barrels and boxes. I saw that they were lading the vessel, and with a tackle were lowering the barrels and boxes into the hold. They were in their shirt-sleeves, some with Guernsey frocks and wide canvas trousers, smeared with grease and tar. One among them wore a blue cloth jacket, with trousers of similar material, and it occurred to me that he might be the mate; for I fancied that the captain of such a big ship must be a very grand individual, and very superbly dressed.

He with the blue jacket was constantly giving orders and directions to the sailors at work, which I noticed were not always promptly obeyed; and frequently the men might be heard suggesting contrary modes of action, until a hubbub of voices would arise disputing about the proper plan for executing the work.

All this would have been different on board a man-of-war, where the order of an officer is instantly obeyed without question or remark; but on a merchant vessel it is far otherwise. The orders of the mate are often issued more as counsels than commands, and the men exercise a sort of discretion in obeying them. This is not always the case, and depends very much on the character of the mate himself; but on board the *Inca* the discipline did not appear to be of the strictest.

What with the clatter of tongues, the 'skreeking' of pulley-blocks, the rattling of boxes against each other, the bundling of trucks over the staging, and other like sounds, there was more noise than I had ever heard in my life. It quite disconcerted me at first; and I stood for some minutes in a state of half bewilderment at what I heard and saw.

After a while there was a sort of lull. The great water-butt that the sailors had been lowering down the hatchway had reached the hold below, and been rolled into its place, and this produced a temporary cessation in the noises.

Just then one of the sailors chanced to set his eyes upon me; and, after regarding me with a comic leer, cried out—

'Ho! my little marlin-spike! What might you be wantin' aboard?—goin' to ship, eh?'

'No', rejoined a second; 'don't yer see he's a captain hisself?—got his own craft there!'

This remark was made in allusion to my schooner, which I had brought along with me, and was holding in my hands.

'Schooner ahoy!' shouted a third of the men. 'Whither bound?'

This was followed by a burst of laughter from all hands, who were now aware of my presence, and stood regarding me as though I was something extremely ludicrous in their eyes.

I was rather abashed by this reception on the part of the rough tars, and remained for some moments without knowing what to say or do. But I was relieved from my uncertainty by the mate in the blue jacket, who, approaching me, asked, in a more serious tone, what was my business aboard.

I replied that I wanted to see the captain. Of course I believed that there was a captain, and that he was the proper person to whom I should address myself in regard to the business I had in view.

'Want to see the captain!' echoed my interrogator. 'And what might be your business with him, youngster? I'm the mate: won't I do?'

I hesitated a moment; but seeing that it was the captain's representative who put the question, I thought there could be no harm in frankly declaring my intentions. I replied—

'I wish to be a sailor!'

If the men had laughed loud before, they now laughed louder. In fact there was a regular yell, in which the mate himself joined as heartily as any of them.

Amidst the peals of laughter, my ears were greeted with a variety of expressions that quite humiliated me.

'Look yonder, Bill!' cried one, addressing a comrade who was at some distance. 'Look at the wee chap as wants to be a sailor. My eyes! You little tuppence worth o' ha'pence, you ain't big enough for a belayin' pin! A see-a-lor! My eyes!'

'Does your mother know yer out?' inquired a second.

'No, that she don't', said a third, making reply for me; 'nor his father, neyther. I'll warrant, now, *the* chap has run away from home. Have you gi'n 'em the slip, little sticklebat?'

'Look here, youngster!' said the mate. 'Take my advice: go back to your mother, give my compliments to the old lady, and tell her to take a turn or two of her petticoat strings round you, belay them to the leg of a chair, and keep you safe moored there for half a dozen years to come!'

This advice elicited a fresh peal of laughter.

I felt humiliated at this rough bantering, and knew not what reply to make. In my confusion I stammered out the words—

'I have no mother to go home to!'

This reply appeared to produce a sudden effect upon

the mirth of these rude-looking men, and I could hear some of them give utterance to certain expressions of sympathy.

Not so, however, the mate, who, without changing his tone of banter, instantly rejoined—

‘ Well, then, go to your father, and tell *him* to give you a good flogging ! ’

‘ I have no father ! ’

‘ Poor little chap ! it’s a horphin arter all ! ’ said one of the tars, in a kind tone.

‘ No father either, you say ’, continued the mate, who appeared to me an unfeeling brute ; ‘ then go to your grandmother, or your uncle, or your aunt, if you’ve got one ; or go anywhere you like, but get about your business from here, or I’ll trice you up, and give you a round dozen on the buttocks ; be off now, I say ! ’

The brute seemed fully in earnest ; and, deeply mortified by the threat, I turned away in obedience to the command.

I had reached the gangway, and was about to step upon the plank, when I observed a man coming in the opposite direction—from the shore. He was dressed in the same style as a merchant or other citizen might have been, with a black frock-coat and beaver hat ; but there was something in his look that told me he belonged to the sea. The complexion of his face was of that weather bronze, and there was an expression in the eyes which I knew to be characteristic of men who lead the life of the mariner. Moreover, his trousers were of blue pilot-cloth, and that gave him a sea-faring look. It struck me at the moment that he was the captain of the ship.

I was not long in doubt. On reaching the gangway, the stranger stepped aboard with an air that betokened him the master ; and I heard him issue some orders in a tone that bespoke his full command of everybody within hearing.

He did not stop after going aboard, but walked on towards the quarter-deck of the vessel.

It occurred to me that I might still have some chance by addressing myself directly to him ; and, without hesitation, I turned back and followed him.

In spite of some remonstrance from the mate and one or two of the men, I kept on till I had overtaken the captain just as he was about to dive down into his cabin.

I arrested his attention by plucking the skirt of his coat.

He turned round in some surprise, and inquired what I wanted with him.

In as few words as I could manage it, I made known my wishes. The only reply he made me was a laugh ; and then turning round, he cried out to one of the men—

‘ Here, Waters ! Hoist this urchin upon your shoulders, and set him ashore. Ha ! ha ! ha ! ’

Without saying another word, he stepped down the companion ladder, and disappeared out of my sight.

In the midst of my chagrin, I felt myself lifted in the strong arms of ‘ Waters ’, who, after carrying me across the staging-plank, and some yards over the wharf, deposited me upon the pavement, and thus addressed me :—

‘ Now, my little sprat ! take Jack Waters’s advice, and keep out o’ salt water as long as you can, else the sharks may get hold on you.’

And then, after a pause, during which he seemed to reflect about something, he inquired—

‘ And you’re a horphin, are ye, my little ’un ? Got neyther father nor mother ? ’

‘ Neither ’, I replied.

‘ A pity it are ! I was once a horphin myself. Well, yer a spunky little chap to be wantin’ to go to sea, and ye deserve somethin’ for it. If I were cap-

tain I'd take you along ; but ye see I'm only afore the mast, and kin do nothin' for ye ; but I'll be back some day again, and maybe you'll be bigger then. Here, take this anyhow for a keepsake, and by it you'll remember me till sometime when you see me in port again, and who knows but then I may find a berth for you. So good-bye now ! Go home again, like a good boy, and stay there till you've growed a bit.'

As the kind-hearted sailor said this, he handed me his knife, and turning away, walked back on board his ship, leaving me alone upon the wharf.

Wondering at his unexpected kindness, I stood gazing after him till he disappeared behind the bulwarks ; and then, mechanically putting the knife in my pocket, I remained for a while without stirring from the spot.

CHAPTER XVII

NOT BIG ENOUGH

My reflections were anything but pleasant, for never had I been so mortified in my life. All my fine dreams of reefing topsails, and seeing foreign lands, had been dissipated in a period of less than ten minutes. All my plans completely frustrated.

My first feeling was that of extreme humiliation and shame. I fancied that the passers-by must all be aware of what had transpired, and of the precise situation in which I stood. I saw, moreover, the heads of several of the sailors as they stood looking at me over the bulwarks, and upon their faces I could perceive a derisive expression. Some of them were still laughing loudly.

I could bear it no longer, and without hesitation I hurried away from the spot.

Near at hand were large boxes, barrels, and bales of merchandise lying upon the wharf. They were not piled together, but scattered about, with spaces between them. Into one of those spaces I glided, and was soon out of sight of everybody, while everybody was equally hidden from my sight. I felt almost as if I had got clear of some danger; so pleasant is it to escape from ridicule, even though one may feel that he has not deserved it.

There was a little box among the others, just big enough for a seat, and upon this I sat down, and gave way to reflection.

What had I best do? Yield up all thoughts of

the sea, and return to the farm, and my crabbed old uncle ?

You will say that this would have been the wisest course for me to have pursued, as well as the most natural. Perhaps so ; but the thought of doing so scarcely entered my mind. I did certainly entertain the thought, but as quickly abandoned it.

‘ No ’, said I to myself, ‘ I am not yet conquered ; I shall not retreat like a coward. I have made one step, and I shall follow it up, if I can. What matters it if they refuse to take me in this big proud ship ? There are others in port—scores of others. Some of them may be glad to have me. I shall try them all before I give up my design.’

‘ Why did they refuse me ? ’ I asked myself, continuing my soliloquy. ‘ Why ? They gave no reason ; what could it have been ? Ha ! my size it was ! They compared me to a marlin-spike, and a belaying-pin. I know what a marlin-spike is, and a belaying-pin, too. Of course, they meant by this insulting comparison to insinuate that I am too small to be a sailor. But a boy-sailor—surely I am big enough for that ? I have heard of sailor boys not so old as I am. What size am I ? How tall, I should like to know ? Oh ! if I only had a carpenter’s rule I would soon settle that point ! How thoughtless of me not to have measured myself before leaving home ! Can I not do it here ? I wonder if there is no way of finding out how tall I am.’

The current of my reflections was at this moment broken in upon, by my observing on one of the boxes some figures roughly scratched with chalk, and on closer inspection I made out the cipher to be ‘ 4 ft.’ I saw at once that it referred to the length of the box, for its height could not have been so much. Perhaps it had been thus marked by the carpenter who made the case, or it may have been put on to guide the sailors in lading the vessel.

Be that as it may, it gave me an idea ; and in

less than three minutes I knew my stature to an inch.

I ascertained it in the following manner: I laid myself down alongside the box, and close in to its edge. Having placed my heels on a level with one end, I stretched myself out to my full length. I then felt with my hand whether the crown of my head came flush with the other end of the case. It did not, though there was scarce an inch wanting to make me as long as the box; but wriggle and stretch my joints as I might, I could not get more than square with it. Of course, it made no difference—as far as determining my height was concerned: if the box was four feet long, I could not be quite four feet; and as I knew a boy of only four feet in height was but a very small boy indeed, I rose to my legs, considerably mortified by the knowledge I had gained.

Previous to this measurement, I really had no idea I was of such short stature. What boy *does* think himself much less than a man? But now I was convinced of my littleness. No wonder Jack Waters had called me a sprat, and his comrades had compared me to a marlin-spike and a belaying-pin.

The knowledge I had gained of my Lilliputian stature put me all out of heart with myself, and my designs now assumed a more gloomy aspect. I felt almost sure that none of the ships would receive me; for I remembered that I had never heard of boy-sailors so small as I was. Certainly I had never seen any; but, on the contrary, some nearly as large as men, who were nevertheless called 'boys' on board the brigs and schooners that frequented our little harbour. It would be hopeless, then, for me to offer myself. After all, I should have to go home again.

I once more sat down upon the box, and proceeded to re-consider the situation. My mind is rather of an inventive turn, and it had a bent that way even in earliest youth. It was not long before a plan offered

itself that promised to relieve me from my dilemma, and enable me to carry out my original intention to its full extent.

I was aided by memory in the conception of this plan. I remembered having both heard and read of boys—and men as well—concealing themselves aboard ships, and being thus carried out to sea ; and then crawling forth from their hiding-places, when the vessels were too far from land for them to be sent back.

The recollection of these daring adventurers had scarcely crossed my mind, before I had formed the resolution to follow their example. Quick almost as the thought, I had made my resolve. I could hide myself on board a ship—perhaps that very ship from which I had been so ignominiously expelled. She was the only one that appeared to be getting ready to sail ; but, to tell the truth, had there been a dozen others starting at the same time, I should have selected her before them all.

You may be surprised at my saying so, but it is easily explained. I was so piqued at the people on board, especially the mate, on account of the uncivil treatment he had shown me, that I felt at the time it would be a sort of revenge to play them this trick. I knew that they would not throw me overboard ; and with the exception of the mate himself, I had not noted any symptoms of a cruel disposition among the sailors. Of course it was natural they should have enjoyed a joke at my expense ; but I remembered, also, that some of them had uttered expressions of sympathy when they heard from me that I was an orphan.

In the big ship, then, was I determined to have passage—spite of mate, captain, and crew !

CHAPTER XVIII

STEALING ABOARD

BUT how was I to get aboard ? How conceal myself when there ?

These were the difficulties that presented themselves. I might walk on deck as I had already done, but not without being observed by some of the crew, and of course ordered ashore again.

Could I not bribe some of the sailors to let me go about the deck ? What had I to bribe them with ? Not a penny of money. My sloop and my clothes—these last of very poor quality—were all I possessed in the world. I would have given the sloop, but a moment's reflection convinced me that no sailor would set any value on an article which he could easily make for himself ; for I presumed that all sailors could manufacture little ships at their pleasure. It would be useless to attempt bribing any of them with such a toy, and I thought no more of it.

But stay ! I had something upon my person of some value . I had a watch. It is true it was but a very common one—an old-fashioned silver watch, and not worth much, though it kept time well enough. It had been given me by my poor mother, though she had left me a much better one, which my uncle had appropriated to himself. The old one, of little value, I was allowed to carry about with me, and fortunately it was in my fob at that moment. Would not this bribe Waters, or some other of the sailors, to 'smuggle' me aboard, and conceal me there till

the ship got out to sea? The thing was not unlikely. At all risks, I resolved to make trial.

Perhaps the chief difficulty would be to see Waters, or any of the sailors, apart from the rest, in order to communicate my wishes; but I resolved to hang about the ship, and watch till some one of them should come ashore alone.

I was not without hopes that I might be able to steal on board of myself—perhaps after nightfall, when the men had ‘knocked off’ work, and were below in the forecastle. In that case, I need not tell any of them of my design. In the darkness, I believed I might manage to crouch past the watch or clamber over the side and get down below. Once in the hold, I had no fear but that I should be able to secrete myself among so many barrels and boxes as they were stowing away.

There were two doubts that troubled me. Would the ship remain in port until night? Would my uncle and his people not be after me before then?

For the first time, I was not very uneasy. I saw that the vessel still carried the same placard as on the preceding day—‘*The Inca, for Peru, to-morrow!*’ It was not likely she would sail upon that day. Moreover, there were still many packages of merchandise lying on the quay—which I knew were intended as part of her lading, from the position in which they were placed. I had heard, moreover, that vessels, when bound for distant parts, are not very punctual in their time of starting.

Reasoning in this way, I felt assured that the ship would not sail on that day, and I should have the chances of boarding her in the night time.

But then there was the other danger—of my being captured and carried back home. On reflection this did not appear imminent. They would not miss me on the farm before nightfall; or if they did, they would wait until dark before going in search of me,

thinking, of course, that night would bring me home. After all, I had no reason to be apprehensive from this source ; and ceasing altogether to think of it, I set about making preparations to carry out my design.

I had foresight enough to perceive, that when once in the ship, I should have to remain concealed for at least twenty-four hours—perhaps much longer. I could not live so long without eating. Where was I to get provisions ? I had not, as already mentioned, one penny in the world, wherewith to purchase food, and I should not have known where or how to beg for it.

But an idea came into my head that promised to relieve me from this dilemma. I could *sell my sloop*, and thus obtain wherewith to buy something to eat.

The little vessel would be of no more use to me now ; and why not part with her at once ?

Without farther consideration, therefore, I made my way out from among the barrels, and proceeded along the quay to look out for a purchaser for my little craft.

I soon succeeded in finding one. A sort of marine toyshop offered itself ; and after a little bartering with the proprietor, I closed the bargain for a shilling. My little sloop, neatly rigged as she was, was worth five times the amount, and, under different circumstances, I would not have parted with her for even that sum ; but the Jew dealer evidently saw that I was in difficulties, and, like all his tribe, had no scruples about taking advantage of them.

I was now in ample funds for my purpose ; and repairing to a convenient shop, I laid out the whole of the money on cheese and crackers. I bought sixpence worth of each ; and having crammed my pockets with my purchase, I returned to my old place among the merchandise, and seated myself once more upon the box. I had grown somewhat hungry—for it had got to be after dinner hour—and I now

relieved my appetite by an attack upon the crackers and cheese, which considerably lightened the cargo in my pockets.

Evening was now approaching, and I bethought me that I might as well take a stroll along by the side of the ship, by way of a reconnaissance. It would enable me to ascertain where I might climb over the side most easily, which knowledge would be of use to me when the hour should arrive for making the attempt. What if the sailors *did* see me going about? They could not hinder me from walking along the quay, and they would never dream of my object in staying there. What if they should take notice of me, and taunt me as before? I could talk back to them, and thus gain a good opportunity for observation—the very thing I wanted.

Without losing another moment, I stepped forth from my resting-place, and commenced sauntering along, with an assumed air of indifference to all that was passing around. I soon came opposite the stem of the big ship, where I paused and looked up. Her deck was nearly on a level with the pavement, because she was now heavily laden, and of course at full depth in the water; but the high bulwarks on her quarter prevented me from seeing the deck. I perceived that it would be easy to step from the quay, and after clambering up the bulwarks, get over by the mizen shrouds; and I at once made up my mind that this would be the proper way. Of course, I should have to creep through the shrouds with great caution. If the night should not prove dark enough, and I should be detected by the watch, it would be all up with me. I should get caught—perhaps suspected as a thief and punished. No matter; I was resolved to risk it.

Everything was quiet on board. I heard neither voice nor noises. Some of the merchandise was still lying upon the wharf, and therefore they could not

have finished lading the vessel. But the men were no longer at work, for I was now near enough to have a view of both the gangway and the main hatch. Whither could they have gone ?

I moved silently forward, until I stood by the very end of the staging. I had now a full view of the hatchway, and a considerable portion of the main deck around it. I saw neither the blue jacket of the mate nor the greasy garments of the sailors. All the men must have gone away to some other part of the ship.

I paused and listened. Indistinctly, I could hear the hum of voices coming from the forward part of the vessel. I knew they were the voices of the crew in conversation with each other.

Just at that moment, I observed a man pass by the opening in the gangway. He was carrying a large vessel that steamed at the top. It contained coffee or some other hot viand. It was the evening meal for the people of the forecastle, and he who carried it was the cook. This accounted for the cessation of the work, and the absence of the sailors from 'amidships'. They were about going to supper. Such was my conjecture.

Partly impelled by curiosity, but as much by a new idea that had entered my mind, I stepped upon the staging and glided cautiously aboard. I caught a glimpse of the sailors far off in the forward part of this ship—some seated upon the windlass, others squatted upon the deck itself, with their tin plates before them, and their jack-knives in their hands. Not one of them saw me—not one was looking in my direction : their eyes were too busy with the cook and his steaming copper.

I glanced hastily around ; there was no one in sight. The new idea to which I have referred became more fully developed. 'Now or never !' whispered I to myself ; and under the impulse, I stepped

down upon the deck, and crouched forward to the foot of the main mast.

I was now on the edge of the open hatchway ; and it was into this I intended to go. There was no ladder, but the rope by which the goods had been lowered, still hung from the tackle, reaching down into the hold.

I caught hold of this rope ; and pulled on it, to find if it was securely fastened above. It proved to be so ; and, grasping it firmly with both hands, I slid downward as gently as I could.

It was a close shave that I did not break my neck—and as it was, I had a tumble at the bottom—but I soon got to my feet again ; and, scrambling over some packages that were not yet stowed in their places, I crawled behind a huge butt, and there esconced myself in darkness and silence.

CHAPTER XIX

HURRAH ! WE ARE OFF !

As soon as I had screened myself behind the butt, I squatted down ; and, in five minutes after, was so fast asleep, that it would have taken all the bells of Canterbury to have waked me. I had got but little sleep on the preceding night, and not a great deal the night before that ; for John and I had been early up for the market. The fatigue, moreover, experienced in my cross-country journey, and the excitement of twenty-four hours' suspense—now somewhat allayed—had quite done me up, and I slept as sound as a top, only that my nap lasted as long as that of a thousand tops.

There had been noises enough to have awaked me much sooner, as I afterwards ascertained. There had been the rattling of pulleys and banging of boxes close to my ears, but I heard nothing of all this.

When I awoke, I knew by my sensations that I had been a long while asleep. It must be far into the night, thought I. I supposed it was night-time, by the complete darkness that enveloped me ; for on first squeezing myself behind the butt, I noticed that light came in by the aperture through which I had passed. Now there was none. It was night, therefore, and dark as pitch—that, of course, behind a huge hogshead down in the hold of a ship.

‘What time of night ? I suppose they have all gone to bed, and are now snug in their hammocks ?

It must be near morning? Can I hear any one stirring?'

I listened. I had no need to listen intently. I soon heard noises. They were evidently caused by heavy objects striking and bumping, just as if the sailors were still busy lading the vessel. I could hear their voices, too, though not very distinctly. Now and then certain ejaculations reached me, and I could make out the words 'Heave!' 'Avast heavin'!' and once the 'Yo-heave-ho!' chanted by a chorus of the crew.

'Why, they are actually at work loading the vessel *in the night-time!*'

This, however, did not greatly surprise me. Perhaps they wished to take advantage of a tide or a fair wind, and were hurrying to complete the stowage of the ship.

I continued to listen, expecting to hear a cessation of the noises; but hour after hour passed, and still the clinking and clanking kept on.

'How very industrious!' thought I. 'They must be pressed for time, and determined to start soon. True, the placard "*For Peru—to-morrow!*" did not keep faith to-day, but no doubt it will do so to-morrow, at a very early hour. So much the better for me; I shall the sooner get out of my uncomfortable situation. It's rather a hard bed I've had, and I am growing hungry again.'

With this last reflection, I was very willing to make a fresh onset upon the cheese and crackers, and I accordingly did so. I had found a fresh appetite during my sleep, and I ate heartily, though it was the *middle of the night!*

The noise of the lading still continued. 'Oh! they are going to keep at it all night. Hard work it is, poor fellows; but no doubt they will receive double wages for it.'

All at once the sounds ceased, and there was pro-

found silence in the ship—at least I could hear no one stirring about.

‘At last they have knocked off’ thought I; ‘they are now gone to bed; but surely it must be near day-break, though day has not yet broken, else I should see some light through the aperture. Well! I shall try to go to sleep again myself.’

I laid me down as before, and endeavoured to compose myself to sleep. In about an hour’s time I had well-nigh succeeded in doing so, when the thumping of the boxes re-commenced, and roused me up afresh.

‘What? they are at it again! Surely they cannot have been to sleep?—an hour—it was not worth their while to lie down for an hour.’

I listened to assure myself that they had really set about work again. There could be no doubt of it. I could hear the clinking and clanking, and the creaking of the pulley-blocks just as before, only not quite so loud.

‘Well’, thought I, ‘it is a strange crew, working thus all night long. Ha! on second thoughts, perhaps it is a fresh set who are at it—another watch that has relieved the former one?’

This was probable enough, and the conjecture satisfied me. But I could no more compose myself to sleep, and lay listening.

Still they worked on, and I could hear the noises through the longest night I ever remember. Several hours they had kept at it, and then there was a pause of about an hour, and then I heard the work progressing as before, and as yet there were no signs of morning—not a ray of light came near me!

I began to fancy I was dreaming, and that those spells of work that seemed to last for hours were only of minutes’ duration. And yet, if they were only minutes, I must have been gifted with a strange appetite, for no less than three times had I fallen

ferociously upon my provisions, until my stock was well-nigh exhausted.

At length the noises ceased altogether, and for several hours I did not hear them. During this interval there was almost complete silence above and around me, in the midst of which I again fell asleep.

When I awoke, my ears were once more greeted with sounds, but these were quite of another character from those I had before been listening to. They were to me sounds of joy, for I at once recognized the well-known 'crik-crik-crik' of a windlass, and the rattling of a great chain. Down where I was, in the hold, I did not hear these noises very distinctly, but enough so to know what was going on above. *They were weighing the anchor ; the ship was about to sail !*

I could scarce restrain myself from giving a cheer ; but I managed to keep silence, fearing that my voice might be heard. It was not yet time. If heard, I should be dragged forth, and sent packing without ceremony. I therefore lay as still as a mouse, and listened to the great chain harshly rasping through the iron ring of the hawse-hole. Harsh as it may have sounded in other ears, it was music to mine at that moment.

The clicking and rasping both ceased after a while, and then another sound reached me. This resembled the rushing of a mighty wind, but I knew it was not that. I knew it was the 'sough' of the sea against the sides of the vessel. It produced a delightful impression upon my mind, for it told me that *the big ship was in motion !*

'Hurrah ! we are off !'

CHAPTER XX

SEA-SICK

THE continued motion of the vessel, and the seething sound of the water, which I could hear very plainly, convinced me that we had parted from the quay, and were moving onward. I felt completely happy; there was no longer any fear of my being taken back to the farm. I was now fairly launched upon salt water, and in twenty-four hours would be out on the wide Atlantic—far from land, and in no danger either of being pursued or sent back. I was in ecstasies of delight at the success of my plan.

I thought it rather strange, their starting *in the night*—for it was still quite dark—but I presumed they had a pilot who knew all the channels of the bay, and who could take them into the open water just as well by night as by day.

I was still somewhat puzzled to account for the extreme length of the night—that was altogether mysterious—and I began to think that I must have slept during the whole of a day, and was awake for two nights instead of one. Either that, or some of it must have been a dream. However, I was too much joyed at the circumstance of our having started, to speculate upon the strangeness of the hour. It mattered not to me whether we had set sail by night or by day, so long as we got safely out into the great ocean; and I laid myself down again to wait until the time should arrive, when I might safely show myself on deck.

I was very impatient for the arrival of that crisis, and for two special reasons. One was, that I had grown very thirsty, and longed for a drink. The cheese and dry crackers had helped to make me so thirsty. I was not hungry, for part of the provision was still left, but I would gladly have exchanged it for a cup of water.

The other reason why I wanted to get out of my hiding-place was, that my bones had become very sore from lying so long on the hard plank, and also from the cramped attitude I was compelled to assume, on account of the want of space. So full of pain did my joints feel, that I could hardly turn myself about ; and I felt even worse when I continued to lie still. This also strengthened my belief that I must have slept during the whole of a day, for a single night upon the naked timbers could hardly have tired me so much.

What with the thirst, therefore, and the soreness of my bones, I kept fidgeting and wriggling about for several hours, without intermission.

For these two reasons I was very impatient to crawl forth from my narrow quarters, and set my foot upon deck ; but for other reasons I deemed it prudent to endure both the thirst and the aching, and remain where I was for some time longer.

I had sufficient knowledge of seaport customs to be aware that ships usually take a pilot a good way out to sea, and in all likelihood there was one on board. Should I show myself before this functionary had been dismissed, I would certainly be taken back in his pilot-boat ; which, after all my success, and all my sufferings, would have been a humiliating result.

Even had there been no pilot, we were yet in the track of fishing boats and small coasting vessels ; and one of these, inward bound, could easily be brought alongside, and I might be chucked into it like a coil of rope, and carried back to the port.

These considerations passed through my mind, and despite the torment of thirst and the painful aching of my joints, I remained within my lurking-place.

For the first hour or two, the ship moved steadily through the water. It was calm weather, I supposed, and she was yet within the shelter of the bay. Then I perceived that she began to sway a little to and fro, and the rushing of the water along her sides became hoarser and more violent. Now and then I could hear the loud bumping of waves as they struck against the bows, and the timbers creaked under the concussions.

These sounds were not displeasing. I reasoned that we had got out of the bay, and were passing into the open sea, where I knew the wind was always fresher, and the waves larger and bolder. 'The pilot', thought I, 'will soon be dismissed, and then I may safely show myself on deck.'

Of course I was not without misgivings as to my reception by the people of the ship—in truth, I felt serious apprehension upon that score. I remembered the harsh brutal mate, and the reckless indifferent crew. They would be indignant at the deception I had practised upon them—perhaps treat me with cruelty—flog me, or commit some other outrage. I was far from being easy in my mind about how they would use me, and I would fain have avoided the encounter.

But that was clearly impossible. I could not keep concealed for the whole voyage, for long weeks, ay, months; I had no provisions, no water, and sooner or later I must go on deck, and take my chances.

While speculating upon these chances, I began to feel very miserable, not with mental anguish alone, but with bodily pain. Worse than thirst it was, or the soreness of my bones. A new misery was fast growing upon me. My head swam with dizziness,

the sweat started from my brow, and I felt sick both at the heart and in the stomach. I experienced a suffocating sensation in my breast and throat, as if my ribs were being compressed inwardly, and my lungs had not room enough to expand and let me breathe. My nostrils were filled with a nauseating smell—the smell of ‘bilge water’—for being at the bottom of the hold, I was close to the latter, and could hear it ‘jabbling’ about under the timbers, where no doubt it had lain for a long time. In all these symptoms I had no difficulty in telling what ailed me: *sea-sickness*—nothing more. Knowing this, I was not alarmed; but yet I experienced horrid sensations, as every one must who is under the infliction of this peculiar malady. Of course I felt ten times worse, situated as I was, choking with thirst, and no water near; for I fancied that a glass of pure water would to some extent have relieved me. It might remove the nausea, and give me freer breath. I would have given anything for one mouthful.

In dread of that terrible pilot, I bore my sufferings as long as I could. But the rocking of the ship every moment became more violent, and the smell of the bilgewater more nauseous. In like proportion rose the revolt in my stomach, until the sickness and retching became quite unendurable.

‘Surely the pilot must have gone back? Whether or not, I can stand it no longer; I must get upon deck, or I shall die—oh!’

I rose from my recumbent position, and began to grope my way along the side of the great butt. I reached the end of it, and felt for the aperture by which I had squeezed myself in. To my great surprise, I found that it was closed up!

I could scarce credit my senses, and I felt again and again, passing my hands upwards and downwards. Beyond a doubt the aperture was shut up! My hands met resistance everywhere, coming in

contact with a perpendicular wall, which, I could tell by the 'feel', was the side of an immense box. It blocked up the interval between the butt and the side of the ship so completely, that there was not space enough on either side to thrust the point of my finger through.

I placed my hands to the box in hopes of being able to push it away, but I could not move it. I laid my shoulder to it, and heaved with all the strength of my body ; I could not even *shake it* ! It was a large packing-case, no doubt filled with heavy goods. A strong man could scarce have stirred it from the spot, and my puny strength was altogether insufficient to move it.

After an effort I desisted from trying, and crept back along the side of the butt, hoping I might get out by the other end ; but on reaching this, my hopes were dissipated in a moment. There was not the space of an inch between the rim of the great cask and another similar barrel, which filled the aperture up to the ribs of the vessel ! A mouse could hardly have squeezed itself through between.

I next felt along the top of both casks, but with like result. There was just space in that direction to admit of passing my hand through, and no more. A huge beam, traversing along the top, was within a few inches of the rounded sides of the casks, and there was no aperture that would have permitted me, small as I was, to have squeezed myself through.

I shall leave you to fancy my feelings, when the conviction broke upon me that I was actually shut in—imprisoned—*built up among the merchandise* !

CHAPTER XXI

ENTOMBED ALIVE

I COULD now comprehend why the night had seemed so long. There had been light enough, but it reached me not. The great box had intercepted it. There had been day, and I knew it not. The men had been working by day, when I thought it was after midnight. Instead of a single night, at least two nights and a day had passed since I crouched into my hiding-place. No wonder I had hungered, and was thirsty—no wonder I felt an aching in my bones. The short intervals of silence I had observed were the hours when the crew were at their meals. The long silence that preceded the weighing of the anchor, had been the second night, when all were resting and asleep.

I have stated, that I fell asleep almost instantly after I had crept into my lurking-place. It then still wanted several hours of sunset. My sleep had been sound and long, lasting, no doubt, till the following morning. But on the previous evening, the stowers had been at work—though I heard them not; and during my deep, unconscious slumber, the box, and no doubt many others, had been placed before the aperture.

Every point was now clear to me, and clearer than all was the horrifying fact, that I was ‘boxed up’.

I did not at first comprehend the full horror of my situation. I knew that I was shut in, and that no strength I could exert would be enough to get me out; but for all that, I did not apprehend any great

difficulty. The strong sailors, who had stowed the packages, could remove them again ; and I had only to shout and bring them to the spot.

Alas ! alas ! little did I think that the loudest shout I might raise, could not have been heard by human being. Little did I suspect, that the hatchway, through which I had descended to the hold, was now closed with its strong hatches and these again covered with a thick tarpaulin—to remain so, perhaps, to the end of the voyage ! Even had the hatches not been down, there would have been little chance of my being heard. The thick wall of bales and boxes would have intercepted my voice, or it might have been drowned altogether by the hoarse and constant rushing of the waves, as they broke along the sides of the ship.

I say, that, on first discovering that I was closed in, my apprehensions were but slight, I thought, only, that I should be delayed awhile from getting water, which I now longed for exceedingly. It would take some time, no doubt, for the men to remove the boxes and relieve me ; and meanwhile I was in misery. These alone were the thoughts that troubled me.

It was only when I had screamed and shouted at the highest pitch of my voice—after I had thundered upon the planks with the heels of my shoes—after I had repeated my cries again and again, and still heard no reply ; it was only then, that I began to comprehend the true nature of my situation. Then, indeed, did I perceive its full and perfect horror. Then, did the conviction burst upon me, that I had no prospect of escape—no hope of being relieved ; in short, that I was *entombed alive* !

I cried, I screamed, I shouted. Long and loudly I cried, but how long I cannot tell. I did not leave off till I was weak and hoarse.

At intervals I listened, but no response reached me—no sound of human voice. The echoes of my own reverberated along the sides of the ship, throughout

the dark hold ; but no voice responded to its lamentable tones.

I listened to discover whether I could not hear the voices of the sailors. I had heard them in their chorus, when they were weighing anchor, but then the ship was at rest, and the waves were not lashing her timbers. Moreover, as I afterwards learned, the hold hatches had then been up, and were only put down on our standing out to sea.

For a long while I listened, but neither command nor chorus reached my ears. If I could not hear their loud baritone voices, how could they hear mine ?

‘ Oh ! they cannot hear me ! They will never hear me ! They will never come to my rescue ! Here I must die—I must die ! ’

Such was my conviction, after I had shouted myself hoarse, and feeble. The sea-sickness had yielded for a time to the more powerful throes of despair ; but the physical malady returned again, and, acting in conjunction with my mental misery, produced such agony as I never before endured. I yielded to it ; my energies gave way, and I fell over like one struck down by paralysis.

For a long while, I lay in a state of helpless stupor. I wished myself dead, and indeed I thought I was going to die. I seriously believe, that at that moment I would have hastened the event if I could ; but I was too weak to have killed myself, even had I been provided with a weapon. I *had* a weapon, but I had forgotten all about it in the confusion of my thoughts.

You will wonder at my making this confession—that I desired death ; but you would have to be placed in a situation similar to that I was in, to be able to realize the horror of despair. Oh, it is a fearful thing ! May you never experience it !

I fancied I was going to die, but I *did not*. Men do not die either from sea-sickness or despair, nor boys either. Life is not so easily laid down.

I certainly was more than half dead, however ; and I think for a good while insensible. I was in a stupor for a long time—for many hours.

At length my consciousness began to return, and along with it a portion of my energies. Strange enough, too, I felt my appetite reviving ; for, in this respect, the ‘ sea-sickness ’ is somewhat peculiar. Patients, under it, often eat more heartily than at other times. With me, however, the appetite of thirst was now far stronger than that of hunger, and its misery was not allayed by any hope of its being appeased. As for the other, I could still relieve it ; some morsels were in my pocket.

I need not recount the many fearful reflections that passed through my mind. For hours after, I was the victim of many a terrible paroxysm of despair. For hours I lay, or rather tossed about, in a state of confused thought ; but at last, to my relief, I fell asleep.

I fell asleep, for I had now been a long time awake, and this, with the prostration of my strength from mental suffering, had at length deadened the nerve of pain ; so that, despite all my misery, I fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXII

THIRST

I SLEPT neither very long, nor very soundly. My sleep was full of dreams, all troubled and horrid ; but not more horrid than the reality to which I once more awoke.

After awaking, it was some time before I could think of where I was ; but on stretching out my arms, I was reminded of my situation : on every side the wooden walls of my prison were within reach, and I could touch them with my fingers all around. I had little more than room sufficient to turn myself in. Small as was my body, another as big as myself would almost have filled the space in which I was shut up.

On again comprehending my fearful situation, I once more gave utterance to loud cries, shouting and screaming at the very highest pitch of my voice. I had not yet lost all hope that the sailors might hear me ; for, as already stated, I knew not what quantity of merchandise might be stowed above me, nor did I think of the hatches of the lower deck being fastened down.

Perhaps it was as well I did not know the whole truth, else the complete despair which the knowledge must have produced might have driven me out of my senses. As it was, the intervals of despair already endured had ever alternated with glimpses of hope ; and this had sustained me, until I became more able to look my terrible fate in the face.

I continued to cry out, sometimes for minutes at

a time, and then only now and again, at intervals ; but as no response came, the intervals between my spells of shouting became longer and longer, till at length, resigning all hope of being heard, I allowed my hoarse voice to rest, and remained silent.

For several hours after this, I lay in a sort of half stupor—that is, my mind was in this state, but unfortunately my body was not so. On the contrary, I was racked with severe bodily pain—the pain of extreme thirst—perhaps the most grievous and hardest to endure of all physical suffering. I never should have believed that one could be so tortured by so simple a thing as the want of a drink of water, and when I used to read of travellers in the desert, and shipwrecked mariners on the ocean, having endured such agonies from thirst, as even to die of it, I always fancied there was exaggeration in the narrative. Like all English boys, brought up in a climate where there is plenty of moisture, and in a country where springs or runlets exist within a few hundred yards of any given point, it is not likely I should ever have known thirst by experience. Perhaps a little of it at times, when at play off in the fields, or by the sea shore, where there was no fresh water. Then I had felt what we ordinarily call thirst—a somewhat unpleasant sensation in the throat, which causes us to yearn for a glass of water. But this unpleasantness is very trifling, and is almost neutralized by the anticipation we have of the pleasure to be experienced while allaying it ; for this, we know, we shall be able to accomplish in a very short time. Indeed, so trifling is the annoyance we feel from ordinary thirst, that it is rare when we are compelled to stoop, either to the ditch or the pond, for the purpose of assuaging it. We are dainty enough to wait, until we encounter a cool well or some limpid spring.

This, however, is not thirst ; it is but thirst in its first and mildest stage—rather pleasant from the knowledge you have of being able soon to remove

the pain. Once take away this confidence—become assured that no wells nor springs are near—no ponds, ditches, lakes, nor rivers—that no fresh water is within hundreds of miles of you—no fluid of any kind that will allay the appetite, and then even this incipient feeling of thirst would at once assume a new character, and become sufficiently painful to endure.

I may not have been so absolutely in need of drink at the time, for I had not been so long without it. I am sure I had often gone for days without thinking of water, but this was just because I knew I might have as much as I pleased at a moment's notice. Now, that there was none to be had, and no prospect of obtaining any, I felt for the first time in my life that thirst was a real agony.

I was not again hungry. The provisions which I had purchased with the price of my sloop were not yet exhausted. Some pieces of the cheese, and several of the biscuits, still remained, but I did not venture to touch them. They would only have increased my thirst. The last morsels I had eaten had produced this effect. My parched throat called only for water—water at that moment appeared to me the most desirable thing in the world.

I was in a situation somewhat similar to that of Tantalus. Water I saw not, but I heard it. The hoarse rushing of the waves as they tore along the sides of the ship was plainly audible. I knew it was the water of the sea—salt, and of no service to me, even could I have reached it—but still it was the sound of water playing continually on my ears as if to mock and tantalize me.

I need not recount the many painful reflections that passed through my mind during the period that followed. Suffice it to say, that for many long hours I endured the terrible pain of thirst, without any hope of being relieved from its torture. I felt certain it was going to kill me. I knew not how soon, but I was sure

that sooner or later it would cause my death. I had read of men living for days under the agony of thirst, before life became extinct. I tried to remember how many days they had lived, but my memory was at fault. Six or seven, I fancied, was the longest period. The prospect was appalling. How could I endure for six or seven days what I was then suffering? How could I bear it for even one day longer? Oh! it was fearful to endure! I hoped that death would sooner come, and release me from such torture!

But a far brighter hope was nigh; and almost upon the instant that I had given mental expression to that despairing wish, a sound fell upon my ears that at once changed the current of my thoughts, and caused me to forget the horror of my situation.

Oh! that sweet sound! It was like the whisper of an angel of mercy!

CHAPTER XXIII

A SWEET SOUND

I WAS lying, or half-standing erect, with my shoulder against one of the great ribs of the ship that traversed my little chamber from top to bottom, dividing it into two nearly equal parts. I had got into this attitude merely as a change ; for during the long days and nights since I entered my confined quarters, I had tried every attitude I could think of, in order to obtain freedom from the monotony of remaining too long in one position. I had tried sitting ; also standing, though somewhat bent ; more generally I had lain down—now on one side, now on the other—sometimes upon my back, and even sometimes on my face.

The position I had now assumed to rest me for a moment was a standing one, though only half erect, as the height of my chamber was not equal to my own length. The point of my shoulder found a resting-place against the rib of the vessel, and my head, drooping forward, was nearly in contact with the side of the great butt, upon the swell of which my hand rested.

Of course, my ear was close to the cask, almost touching its hard oaken staves ; and it was through these that the sound reached me which I have described as having caused a sudden and pleasant reaction in my feelings.

The sound itself was simple enough to understand. I easily understood it. It was the ' cluk-cluk ' of water moving about inside the butt, its motion being caused by the pitching of the ship, and a slight roll-

ing of the cask itself, which had not been steadily 'cleeted' in its place.

The first 'cluk' was music to my ears ; but I did not permit myself the free enjoyment of it until I had fully satisfied myself as to the nature of what I had heard.

I had raised my head with a start, and I now placed my cheek against the oak staves, and stood with every nerve in my ear straining to catch the sounds. I waited a good while, for it was only at intervals that the ship gave her heaviest lurches, and only then did the fluid within the butt become disturbed. I waited patiently, and my patience was rewarded. There again !—'cluk-cluk-cluk !'

'*Cluk-cleek-clee-chuckle-cluk.*' Beyond a doubt there was water in the cask !

I could not restrain myself from uttering a shout of joy. I felt like one who had been for a long while in the act of being drowned, and who at length had reached land, and was saved.

The sudden transition in my feelings almost caused me to faint ; as it was, I staggered back against the timbers, and dropped down in a state of half-insensibility.

Not long did I remain so. The acute torture soon prompted me to action ; and I rose again, and leant forward against the cask.

For what purpose ? To find the bung, of course ; draw it out, and relieve my thirst by a draught of water. What other object could I have in approaching it ?

Alas ! alas ! my new-sprung joy fast fled away, almost as suddenly as it had arisen ! Not quite so suddenly ; for it took me some time to run my fingers all over the swelling outlines of that great vessel ; to pass them around its ends as far as the heavy boxes would permit ; to go over the ground again and again, inch by inch, and stave by stave, with all the careful

touch of one who is blind. Yes, it took me minutes to accomplish this, and to become satisfied that the bung was not upon my side of the cask—that it was either upon the top or the opposite side ; but, whether one or the other, it was beyond my reach, and it was therefore as useless to me as if no such aperture existed.

In my search for the bung I had not forgotten the vent or tap-hole. I knew that every cask is provided with both these apertures—that one should be in the side and the other in the head or end. But my search for the vent did not occupy two seconds of time. I at once perceived that both ends of the barrel, with the exception of a few inches near the edge, were completely blocked up—one by the box, and the opposite one by the other cask, already mentioned—the latter of which appeared to be a counterpart of that in front of me.

It occurred to me that this other cask might also contain water, and I proceeded to make a 'reconnaissance' of it ; but I could only 'grobe' a small portion of its end, and there I felt only the smooth hard heading of oak, that resisted my touch like a wall of rock.

It was only after all this had been accomplished, that I began once more to feel the misery of my situation—once more to resign myself to despair. I was now tantalized even worse than ever. I could hear at intervals the 'jabbling' of the water within two inches of my lips, and was unable to taste it ! Oh ! what I would have given for one drop upon my tongue ! one gill to moisten my throat, parched and burning like a coal of fire !

If I had had an axe, with room to wield it, how I should have burst open that huge cistern, and drank fiercely of its contents ! But I had no axe, no weapon of any kind ; and without one the thick oaken staves were as impenetrable to me as if they had been solid iron. Even had I succeeded in reaching the bung or

vent, how could I have got out the stopper or vent-peg? With my fingers it would plainly have been impracticable; though in the eagerness of my first hope I had never thought of this difficulty.

I believe that I once more sat or staggered down, and after a little while rose up again, and made a fresh examination of the butt; but I am not sure about what I did, for this new disappointment had quite stupefied me, and I cannot exactly remember what followed for a good while after. I believe, however, that I performed these acts in a sort of mechanical way; and also that I tried once more to move the box, and pushed against it with all my strength; but, as before, to no purpose.

After this I must have lain down, and resigned myself to despair, that again bound me in its hideous embrace. How long I cannot tell; but its spell was at length broken by a circumstance that once more put my senses on the alert.

CHAPTER XXIV

TAPPING THE BUTT

I HAD stretched myself lengthwise in my cell, and was lying upon my right side, with my head resting upon my arm. While thus placed, I felt something pressing against my thigh, as though there was a protuberance on the plank, or some piece of hard material under me. It began to give me pain, and I reached down my hand to remove it, at the same time raising my body so that I might get at it. I was a little surprised on not finding anything, but the next moment I perceived that the hard substance that annoyed me was not upon the planks, but inside the pocket of my trousers !

What had I got there ? I remembered nothing, and might have supposed it was some fragments of biscuit ; but these I had deposited in the pockets of my jacket, and they could not have got down to my trousers. I felt the article from the outside. It was something very hard, and of a longish shape ; but I could not think what, for as yet I could remember nothing that I had carried, with the exception of the biscuits and cheese.

I had to raise myself up in order to insert my hand into the pocket, and not until I had done so was I made acquainted with the nature of its contents. The hard oblong thing that had thus attracted my attention was the knife given me by the sailor, Waters ; and which, having thrust mechanically into my pocket at the moment of receiving it, I had quite forgotten.

The discovery caused me no particular emotion at the moment. Simply a thought of the kindness of the sailor as contrasted with the brutality of the mate—just the same thought that passed through my mind at the time the gift was presented. With this reflection I drew forth the knife, and flinging it down beside me, so that it might be out of the way, I lay down on my side as before.

But I had scarcely stretched myself, when an idea crossed my mind, that prompted me to start up again, as suddenly as if I had lain down upon red-hot iron. Unlike the latter, however, it was not a feeling of pain that caused this quick movement, but one of pleasure—of joyful hope. It had just occurred to me that with the knife I might make a hole in the side of the cask, and thus reach the water!

So practicable did the design appear, that I had not a doubt of being able to accomplish it; and the certainty I now felt of getting at the precious contents of the cask, produced a complete revulsion in my feelings—another sudden transition from despair to hope.

I groped eagerly about, and soon recovered the knife. I had scarce looked at it, on receiving it from the hands of the friendly sailor. Now I examined it carefully—by the touch, of course—I felt it all over; and as well as I was able by such a test, calculated its strength and fitness for the work I had designed for it.

It was what is termed a 'jack-knife', with a buck-horn handle, and but one blade—a sort in common use among sailors, who usually carry them on a string passed around the neck, and to which the knife is attached by a hole drilled in the haft. The blade was a square one, drawn to an angular point, and shaped somewhat like the blade of a razor. Like the latter, too, the back was thick and strong, as I could tell by the 'feel'. I was gratified at perceiving this, for I knew that it would require a strong blade to hew a hole through the tough staves of oak.

The instrument I held in my hands was the very thing for the purpose, almost as good as a chisel. Haft and blade were nearly of equal length, and when opened out, they measured about ten inches together.

I have been thus particular in describing this knife ; and from me it merits all that has been said, and far more, in praise of its good qualities ; since, but for it, I should not now be alive to give an account of its wonderful performances.

Well, having opened the knife, and drawn my fingers along the blade, and felt it over and over again, in order to get acquainted with its form and fitness ; and then, having examined the back spring, and tried its strength by various openings and shuttings : having done all this, I went to work upon the hard oak.

You will wonder that I wanted to take all these precautions. You will fancy that, tortured as I was by thirst, I would scarce have had so much patience, but would have set about making the hole at once, in order the sooner to get relief by a draught of the water. Certainly my patience was greatly tempted ; but I never was what is called a rash boy, and in that dark hour I felt more than ever in my life the necessity of prudence and caution. I knew that death—a horrid death from thirst—awaited me, if I did not succeed in getting at the contents of the cask ; and should any accident happen to the knife, should the blade break, or even the point be snapped off, this death would surely be my fate. No wonder, then, I took the precaution to examine well my weapon and ascertain its strength. I might have acted with more recklessness had I reflected more. Even had I been certain of procuring the water, what then ? It could only save me from dying of thirst. But hunger ? How was that to be relieved ? Water was drink, but not food. Where was I to find food ?

Strange to say, I did not think of food at that moment. I was not yet hungry, and the agony of

thirst had hitherto been my only apprehension, precluding all thoughts of the kindred appetite. The prospect of the nearer danger—that of perishing from the want of water—had hindered my mind from dwelling on that which was more remote ; and, strange to say, I had as yet scarce given a thought to what shortly after became my exclusive apprehension—the danger of dying by hunger.

It is certain, therefore, that had I reflected on this, I should have proceeded with less prudence. Fortunately, I did not reflect ; but set about the accomplishment of my purpose with due method and caution.

I selected a spot in the side of the cask, where one of the staves appeared to be a little chafed and damaged. I chose it better than half way from the top. The cask might be only half full, though that was not likely. If so, it would be necessary for me to make my tap below the surface of the water, otherwise I should have to make it over again. A hole would have been of no use to me, unless it entered below the water line.

Having chosen the spot, I at once set to work, and in a short while had the gratification to find that I was rapidly hollowing out a space in the thick stave. The knife behaved admirably, and hard as was the oak, it had to yield to the harder steel of that beautiful blade. Bit by bit, and chip by chip, the wood was detached before its keen point ; and as each fresh fibre was loosened, I seized it with my fingers and pulled it off, to make way for the blade.

For more than an hour I kept on, of course working in darkness. I had by this time grown so familiar with darkness, that I no longer experienced the feeling of helplessness one always has when suddenly plunged into it. My sense of touch seemed to have become keener and more delicate, as is well known to be the case with those who are blind. I felt no difficulty on the score of light ; and as it would have

availed but little for the work in which I was engaged, I never even thought of its absence.

I did not progress as fast as a carpenter would have done with his mortising chisel, or a cooper with his breast-bit or auger ; but I had the gratification of knowing that I was progressing. Though slowly, I perceived that the hollow was getting deeper and deeper ; the stave could not be more than an inch in thickness : surely I should soon be through it ?

I could have done the business in less time, had I been more reckless of consequences ; but I feared to strain too heavily upon the blade, and, remembering the old adage, 'The more haste the less speed', I handled the precious tool with care.

It was more than an hour before I approached the inner surface of the plank. I knew that I was nearly through it from the depth to which I had cut.

My hand now trembled as I worked. My heart beat loudly against my ribs. It was a moment of vivid emotion. A fearful thought was in my mind—a dread doubt was troubling me—a doubt that it *was water* ! This doubt had occurred to me at an earlier period, but at no time did I feel it so intensely as at that moment, just upon the eve of its solution.

Oh, heaven ! should it not be water after all—should the contents of the cask prove to be rum or brandy, or even wine ! I knew that none of these would avail to quench my burning thirst. For the moment they might, but only for the moment ; it would return fiercer and more craving than ever. Oh ! if it should be one, or any of them, then indeed was I lost—then indeed might I yield up my last hope, and die as men have often died, under the madness of intoxication !

I was close to the inner surface of the stave ; moisture was already oozing through the wood, where it had been penetrated by the point of the blade. I hesitated to make the last cut ; I dreaded the result.

I hesitated but a short while. The torture of my

thirst impelled me on ; and plunging the blade deeply, I felt the last fibres yielding to its point. Almost at the same instant a cold spray rushed out, sprinkling my hand upon the haft, and rushing far up my sleeve.

After giving the blade a twist, I drew it out, and then a jet shot forth, as if forced from a syringe. In another instant my lips covered the vent, and I drank delicious draughts—not of spirits, not of wine—but of water, cold and sweet as though it issued from a rock of limestone !

CHAPTER XXV

THE VENT-PEG

OH ! how I drank of that delicious water ! I thought I should never be satisfied ; but at length satiety was produced, and I thirsted no more.

The effect was not immediate—the first long draught did not relieve me, or only for a time. I longed again, and again placed my lips to the spouting stream ; and this I did repeatedly, until the longing returned not, and the pangs of thirst were forgotten as if I had never felt them !

It is beyond the power of the imagination to form any idea of the agony of thirst—mere fancy cannot realize it. It must be experienced to be known, but a proof of its intensity might be given by adducing the horrible alternatives to which men have resorted when reduced to the extremity of this torturing pain. And yet, withal, as soon as the craving is appeased, so soon as a sufficient quantity of water has passed the lips, the pain exists no more, but ends with the suddenness of a dream ! No other bodily ill can be so quickly healed.

My thirst was now gone, and I felt buoyant ; but my habitual prudence did not forsake me. During the intervals when my lips were removed from the vent, I had kept the water from running by pressing the end of my fore-finger into the hole, and using it as a stopper. Something whispered me that it would be well not to waste the precious fluid, and I resolved to obey the suggestion. When I had finished drink-

ing, I used my finger as before ; but after a little, I grew tired of making a vent-peg of my finger, and looked about for something else. I groped all over the bottom timbers, but could find nothing—not the smallest piece of stick within reach of my right hand. It was the fore-finger of my left that was playing vent-peg ; and I dared not remove it, else the water would have gushed forth in a tolerably thick, and therefore a wasteful, jet.

I bethought me of a piece of cheese, and I drew what remained from my pocket. It was of too excellent a quality for the purpose, and crumbled as I applied it to the aperture. It was forced out of my fingers by the strength of the spouting water. A biscuit would have been equally unserviceable. What was I to do ?

In answer to this interrogatory, it occurred to me that I might caulk the hole with a rag from my jacket. It was fustian, and would answer admirably.

No sooner thought of, than with my knife I cut a piece from the flap, and placing it over the hole, and punching it well in with the blade, I succeeded in stopping the run, though I could perceive that it yet leaked a little. This, however, would not signify. I only intended the piece of cloth for a temporary stopper, until I could cast around, and contrive something better.

I was once more free to reflect, and I need not tell you that my reflections soon guided me back to despair. To what purpose had I been saved from death by thirst ? It would only be a protraction of my misery—a few hours more of wretched existence—for certainly I must meet death by hunger. There was no alternative. My little stock was almost consumed. Two biscuits, and a handful of cheese-crumbs, were all that remained. I might make another meal upon them—a very slight one ; and then—ay, then—hunger, gnawing hunger—weakness—feebleness—exhaustion—death !

Strange to say that while suffering from thirst, I had not thought of dying by hunger. It would be more exact to say I had *scarce* thought of it. At intervals, some glimpses of such a fate had been before my mind's eye ; but, as I have already stated, the stronger agony eclipsed the weaker, and rendered it almost uncared for.

Now, however, that all fears of the former were removed, the dread of the latter usurped its place. The little interval of buoyant feeling which I experienced, was merely the consequence of my unexpected relief from a painful suffering, and only lasted until calm reflection returned. In a few minutes it was over, and my apprehension of death became as acute as ever. It is wrong to call it an apprehension, for it was a positive certainty that stared me in the face. I had not given five minutes' thought to my situation, till I felt as certain of death as I was that I still lived. There was no hope of escape from my prison—that I had given up long ago ; and since I had nothing to eat, and not the slightest hope of obtaining anything, how was I to live ? It required no reasoning to find an answer to the question.

Perish I must, and by hunger—there was no alternative, unless I chose to die by my own hand. I was now aware that I possessed the means to effect the latter, but strange to say, the madness that would have prompted me to it, during the first throes of my despair, was gone ; and I could now contemplate death with a calmness that surprised me.

Three modes of dying were possible, and within my reach—thirst, hunger, and suicide ; and it may astonish you to know that the next thing I did was to take into consideration which of the three it would be easiest to endure.

This in reality was the leading idea in my mind as soon as I became convinced that I *must* die. You need not be astonished. Only imagine yourselves in

my situation, and you will perceive that such thoughts were but natural.

The first of these three I rejected at once—it *could not be the easiest*. I had almost tried it, and my experience satisfied me that existence could scarce be ended in a less gentle way. Only upon the two last, therefore, did my mind dwell ; and for some time I sat coolly weighing the one against the other. Unfortunately, my young days had been passed in a manner almost heathenish ; and at that time I did not even know that taking one's own life was a crime. This consideration, therefore, had no weight in the balance, and all I had to guide me was the conjecture as to which of the two modes of death would be least painful !

And I sat for a long while—coolly and calmly I sat—engaged in this singular contemplation.

Good and evil must be instinctive. Something within told me it would be wrong to take away the life which God had given, even though the act might save me from protracted pain.

This thought triumphed ; and, mustering all my courage, I resolved to await the event, whatever time it might please God to put a termination to my misery.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE BISCUIT-BOX

HAVING resolved, then, not to die by my own hand, I at the same time came to the resolution to live as long as I could. Though my two biscuits would not have served me for another good meal, I determined to make at least four out of them, and also to make the intervals between each two as long as possible—just as long as I could endure without eating.

The desire of prolonging my existence had been gradually growing upon me, ever since I had been relieved from the torture of thirst; and it had now become as strong as at any period of my life. The truth is, I had a presentiment that I should still survive—that I was not going to perish of hunger; and this presentiment—though ever so slight, and entertained only at intervals—helped to sustain me with a sort of faint hope.

I can hardly tell why I should have entertained it at all, so really hopeless appeared my situation. But then I remembered that, but a few hours before, the prospect of obtaining water was equally hopeless, and now I possessed enough to drown myself in. Fanciful as it may seem, this idea had occurred to me—that is, to drown myself! But the moment before, while contemplating the easiest means of death, that of drowning had actually come before my mind. I had often heard that it was about the least painful mode of terminating one's existence. Indeed I might say that I had myself made trial of it.

When saved by Harry Blew I *was* drowned to all intents and purposes—so far as the suffering was concerned—and I am sure that had I been then permitted to go to the bottom, I should never have felt another pang. I was satisfied, therefore, that drowning was not so very hard a death ; and I actually had it in consideration whether I should not cut my way into the great butt, and in this way end my misery ! This was during my moments of despair, when I seriously contemplated self-destruction ; but these moments had passed, and I again felt an unaccountable desire that my life should be prolonged.

Perhaps this change in my sentiments is not so inexplicable. The strange circumstance of my finding the water, with the consequent escape from death by thirst, had something in it of a nature almost miraculous : something that suggested the hand of Providence stretched forth in my favour. That hand could equally aid me in other ways—could equally save me from starvation by hunger ; and though I knew not how, it might yet deliver me from my fearful prison.

Perhaps some ideas of this kind were passing in my mind, and it was from these I drew that indefinable presentiment that I should yet escape.

I ate my half biscuit, and again drank of the water, for my thirst kept returning upon me, though it no longer gave me uneasiness. I caulked up the vent as before, and then sat down in silence.

I had no idea of making any exertion. I had no hope that anything I could do would in the least degree alter my situation. What could I do ? My hope—if hope I may call it—rested only upon fate, upon chance, or rather, I should say, upon God. But how the hand of Providence could be interposed on my behalf, I had not the slightest idea.

Those dark, silent hours were hard to endure. It was only at intervals that I was cheered by the pre-

sentiment I have described ; but in the far longer intervals between, I felt gloomy and despairing.

Nearly twelve hours must have passed before I ate my second half biscuit. I waited as long as I could, but at length I was obliged to yield to the calls of hunger. The little morsel produced no satisfaction. It rather appeared to render my appetite more keen and craving. I drank copiously, but although the water filled my stomach, it had no effect in stifling the sensations of hunger.

In about six hours after, I made another meal—another half biscuit gone. I could not endure longer ; and when the tiny crumb was swallowed, I knew not that I had eaten. I was as hungry as ever !

Scarce three hours was the next interval. My brave resolution to make the two biscuits last for as many days was to no purpose. Not one day had passed, and the last morsel had disappeared.

What next ? What should I eat next ? I was as hungry as ever.

I thought of my shoes. I had read of men sustaining themselves for a time by chewing up their boots, their belts, their gaiters, their pouches and saddles ; in short, anything that was made of leather. Leather is an animal substance, and, even when tanned and manufactured, still possesses nutriment, though only in a slight degree. With these memories, then, I thought of my shoes.

I was stooping down to unlace them, when I was startled by something cold that struck me upon the back of the head. It was a stream of water. The rag of fustian had been pressed out, and the water was escaping. The jet had fallen on the back of my head, just upon the bare part of the neck, and its coldness, together with the suddenness of the thing, caused me to start up in some surprise.

Of course, my astonishment ceased as soon as I perceived what it was that had startled me.

I placed my finger in the aperture, and groping about for the rag, soon found it, and recaulked the cask.

This had now happened more than once, and much water had been wasted. The rag had become loosened by the action of the water, and was pressed out. It occurred to me that it might occur again while I was asleep, and most of the water in the butt might run off, and thus get lost altogether. Some precaution, therefore, must be taken—I must find a better stopper.

With this idea I went to work to contrive one. I searched all around the 'floor' of my cabin in hopes of picking up some stray chip, but no such thing was there.

I bethought me of cutting a splint from one of the great ribs of the ship; and I made the attempt with my knife, but the wood was hard oak and painted, and defied all my efforts to split off a piece large enough for my purpose. In the end, no doubt, I should have succeeded; but just then it occurred to me that I could more easily get a supply from the box. This being a rough packing case, was no doubt made of common deal; and from the touch I was convinced that it was so. Of course, being much softer than the oak, and more easily split with a knife, I should have a better chance of procuring what I wanted; and, moreover, a piece of deal would do better for a stopper.

Shifting myself round, therefore, so as to face towards the box, I began to feel all over it for the best place to use my knife upon.

At one of the corners I perceived the point of advantage, where one of the boards slightly projected above the level of the top. Into this board I sunk my blade, pressing it downward, and causing it to act both as a wedge and a chisel. I had given but one push upon it, when I perceived that the board was loose. The nails which had fastened it had either been broken off or drawn out, probably by the rough mauling it

had got while being stowed. Whether or not, I felt that it was quite loose, and moved under my touch.

I at once drew out the blade. I saw that I could pull off the board with my hands, and it would then be easier to split off the piece that I wanted. I laid the knife down, and applying my fingers to the projecting end of the board, I seized it firmly, and pulled with all my might.

It yielded to my strength. There was some creaking and crackling, as the nails were drawn out or broken ; and then a sound reached my ears that caused me to desist and listen. It was the sound of some hard objects escaping from out the box and falling with a rattle upon the timbers beneath.

I was curious to know what these objects were, and letting go my hold, I stretched my hands downward, and groped for what had been spilled. I lifted two of similar shape and size, and as I ran my fingers over them, I could not restrain myself from giving utterance to a shout of joy.

I have said that my touch had grown almost as delicate as that of a blind man ; but had it been ever so obtuse, I could have told at that moment, what were the two flat round objects which I held between my fingers. There was no mistaking the 'feel' of them. They were *biscuits* !

CHAPTER XXVII

A CASK OF BRANDY

YES, biscuits—each of them as large as a small plate, and nearly half an inch in thickness, smooth and round and pleasant to the touch, and of a rich brown colour—I could tell the colour, for I knew from the feel that they were real *sea* biscuits ; or, as they are generally styled, ‘ sailor’s biscuits ’, to distinguish them from the white ‘ captain’s biscuits ’, to which, in my opinion, they are superior—far sweeter and more wholesome.

How sweet they tasted at that moment ! for on the very instant that I got hold of them, did I raise one to my mouth, and bite a large piece out of its smooth circumference. Delicious morsel ! a whole one was soon ground into crumbs and swallowed, and then a second, and a third, and a fourth, and a fifth, and perhaps still another ! for I never thought of keeping count, so long as hunger urged me to eat. Of course, I washed them down with copious libations from the butt.

I remember no meal eaten during all my life that I enjoyed with so much relish, as this one of biscuits and water. It was not simply from the delight experienced by satisfying the cravings of a hungry stomach—which of itself, as every one knows, is a high source of enjoyment—but along with it, was the pleasure derived from my discovery—the delightful consciousness, still fresh before my mind, that my life which but the moment before I held as lost, was still

to be spared me. Beyond a question, the hand of Providence *had* interposed to save my life.

I had no doubt that this was so. With such store both of food and drink, I could live, despite the darkness of my dungeon, for weeks, for months—until the voyage should come to an end, and the ship be emptied of its cargo.

I felt sure of safety, as I made an inspection of my provision chest. They came pouring forth, those precious cakes, spilling out at the touch, and cracking together like castanets.

Their rattle was music to my ears. I thrust my hands into the box, delighting to bury my fingers amid the rich profusion of its contents ; as the miser joys to revel among his heaps of gold. I thought I should never tire groping among them, feeling how thick and large they were, and drawing them out from the box, and putting them back into it, and tumbling them about in every way. I acted just like a child with its drum and its ball, its top and its orange, rolling them from side to side ; and it was a long time before I grew tired of this childlike play.

Long—I am sure I must have gone on in this way for nearly an hour, before the excitement into which the discovery had put me cooled down, and I could act and think calmly.

It is difficult to describe the sensation one feels, when suddenly rescued from the jaws of death. Escape from an impending danger is different, as one is not certain that the danger would end in death ; for there are few kinds of peril that produce the conviction that death must be the event. When this conviction once enters the mind, and after that the self-expecting victim survives, the sudden reaction from despair to joy is a feeling of such intense happiness, as almost to cause bewilderment. Men ere now have died of such joy, while others have gone mad.

I neither died nor went mad ; but could my be-

haviour have been observed for some time after breaking open the biscuit-box, it might have been *supposed* that I was mad.

The first thing that restored me to calmer reflection, was the discovery that the water was running from the cask, in a full jet. The aperture was quite open. I was chagrined at making this observation—I may say, terrified. I knew not how long the waste had been going on ; the *sough* of the sea outside prevented me from hearing it, and the water, as soon as it fell, filtered off under the timbers of the vessel. Perhaps it had been running ever since I last drank ; for I had no recollection of having put back the rag stopper. My excitement had hindered me from thinking of it. If that were really the case, then there had been much waste, and the thought filled me with dismay.

But an hour ago, I should have not so much regarded this loss of water. Then I knew there would still be drink enough to outlast the food—to last as long as I expected to live. Now, however, my altered prospects caused me to regard the circumstance with very different ideas. I might be months alive, and still cooped up behind the cask. Every drop of its contents might be required. If it was to run short before the ship reached her port, then I should be brought back to my original position, and death by thirst would be my fate after all. No wonder, I perceived with dismay that the stopper was out, and the stream was flowing !

I lost not a moment in pressing my fingers into the hole, and cutting off the run. Then once more corking with the rag, I proceeded to carry out my original design, of making a proper vent-peg of wood.

A piece was easily obtained from the board I had detached from the lid of the box—for it was the lid that was towards me ; and the soft deal, yielding to the keen blade of my knife, was soon shaped into a conical peg, that fitted exactly.

Brave sailor ! how I blessed thee for thy gift !

I blamed myself much for this piece of negligence ; and I felt regret, too, that I had tapped the cask so low down. However, the latter had been itself a measure of precaution ; and at the time it was done, I had but one thought, and that was to allay my thirst as quickly as possible.

It was fortunate I noticed the jet as soon as I did. Had it been allowed to continue running, until it stopped of itself—in other words, had the surface of the water sunk to the level of the tap-hole—then would there have been but little left, scarce enough to have lasted me for a week.

I endeavoured to ascertain what had been the amount of wastage, but I could arrive at no satisfactory conclusion. I sounded the cask, by striking it in different places with the butt end of my knife, but I derived little knowledge from this. The creaking of the ship's timbers, and the rush of the waves, prevented any observation of this kind from being definite or accurate. I fancied that the blows gave back a very hollow sound, as if a large space within was empty. If it were a fancy, it was far from being a pleasant one ; and I gave over my 'soundings' with a considerable feeling of uneasiness. Fortunately the tap was a very small hole, and the jet from it of no great thickness. As near as I could tell by the touch, and from the repeated application I had made to it with my lips, this could not have been over the thickness of my little finger, which at that time was not of much greater circumference than a goose's quill. I knew that such a tiny stream would be a long while in spending the contents of so large a tank ; and I endeavoured to recall to mind how long it might have been since I last drank. In this, however, I was not successful. It seemed but a short while to me, but excited as I had been, and confused in my ideas, it might have been an hour, or even more. I was completely baffled in any calculation that I attempted.

I remained for a considerable time, pondering upon some scheme by which I might determine the quantity of water that still remained in the cask, for about this I was now most anxious. Only one hour before, food had been the source of my uneasiness ; before that it had been drink ; and now once more drink was my trouble, for of meat I had a plenty.

I remembered having heard that brewers, coopers, and others whose business lies among the great wine vaults of the docks, had a way of telling pretty nearly the contents of a barrel of liquid, without submitting them to actual measurement, but I had not heard how they managed the matter. I regretted not having been told.

I thought of a plan by which I could have ascertained, to a nicety ; but I lacked the proper instrument to put it in execution. I understood enough of hydraulics to know that water will rise to its own level if guided by a pipe or tube ; I knew, therefore, that if I had only possessed a piece of hose, I could have attached it to the tap-hole, and thus discovered how high the water stood in the cask.

But where was the hose or other pipe to be had ? Of course I could not get at what I desired in this way, and I relinquished the idea without giving it farther consideration.

Just at this moment a better plan suggested itself, and I proceeded to put it in execution. It was so simple, I wondered I had not thought of it before. It was neither more nor less than to cut another hole through the staves, higher up, and if need be another, and so on, until I reached a point where the water ceased to run. This would give me the knowledge I wanted.

Should I make my first hole too low, I could easily stop it with a peg, and so with all the others.

It is true that I was laying out for myself a considerable amount of work, but I rather liked this

than otherwise. While employed, I should feel much happier, as my occupation would enable me the better to pass the time, and keep me from thinking too much of my miserable situation.

But just as I was about to commence my experiments on the butt, it occurred to me that I had better try the other one—that which stood at the end of my little chamber. Should this also prove to be a water-cask, then I need be no longer uneasy, for surely two such great vessels should contain enough to supply me during the longest voyage that ever was made.

Without more ado, then, I turned upon the second cask, and commenced drilling a hole in the end of it. I was not so excited as before, for I did not feel that so much depended upon the result. For all that, it caused me a good deal of disappointment, when, on getting the point of my blade through to the inside, I discovered that the stream that came jetting out was not water but pure brandy, which proved that it was a brandy-cask I had tapped.

I again turned my attention to the water-butt ; for I was now more anxious than ever to ascertain how much it contained, since on this depended my future safety.

Choosing a stave near the middle of the cask, I proceeded in the same manner as I had done when making my first incision ; and working constantly for an hour or more, I felt the thin shell springing before the point of my knife. My apprehensions were acute, though not so much as on the former occasion. Then it was a matter of life or death, almost upon the instant ; now the contingency was more remote, and not quite so definite or certain. Withal I could not help a strong feeling of anxiety, nor could I avoid uttering an exclamation of delight, when I felt the cold spring of water gushing along the blade of my knife. I soon closed the slight aperture, and re-commenced my drilling process upon the next stave higher up.

This I also penetrated in due time, and was again rewarded for my patient labour by getting my fingers wet, from the inside.

Another step higher, with a result like.

Another, and the water came not. No matter, I was now far up near the top of the cask. I had found water at the last boring but one. It must stand still higher within. The cask, therefore, was more than three parts full. Thank Heaven ! There would be enough to last me for many months !

I felt satisfied with the result, and, sitting down, I ate another biscuit with as much relish and contentment as if I had been dining upon turtle and venison at the table of a Lord Mayor.

CHAPTER XXVIII

GOING ON ' RATIONS '

I WAS full of complacence. There was nothing now to cause me uneasiness. The prospect of being cooped up for six months might have been very unpleasant under other circumstances, but after the far more terrible dread of horrid death from which I had just been delivered, it appeared as nothing ; and I resolved to bear my long imprisonment with patience and resignation.

Six months I would have to endure this gloomy confinement—six months, at the least. There was but little probability of my being released before the expiration of a half-year : a long term—long and hard to be borne either by captive or criminal—hard even in a lighted chamber, with bed and fire, and well-cooked food, in daily converse with human beings, and the sound of human voices almost continually ringing in your ears. Even with these advantages, to be shut up for six months is a painful experience.

How much more painful would mine be, cramped up in close quarters, where I could neither stand erect nor lie at full length ; neither couch, nor fire, nor light to give me comfort ; breathing foul air, reclining upon the hardest of oak, living upon bread and water—the simplest diet upon which a human being could exist, and that unvaried by the slightest change, with no sound ever reaching my ear save the almost ceaseless creaking of the ship's timbers, and the monotonous surging of the ocean wave—cer-

tainly six months of such an existence was not a pleasant prospect to contemplate.

Withal I regarded it not. I was still too happy at my deliverance from death, to be nice about the kind of life that was before me, though, as time passed, most probably I should grow tired enough of such a dreary existence.

Now I was all joy and confidence. Not so confident, however, as to rely upon conjecture—upon a mere guess as to the amount of my means of existence. Upon this point I was determined to be fully assured, and that without further loss of time. My stores, both of food and drink, I resolved to submit to actual measurement, in order to be satisfied as to whether they would be sufficient to last me till the end of the voyage.

Hitherto I had felt no apprehension upon this head. Such a large box of biscuit, and such an inexhaustible well of water, could never be expended. This was my first idea; but, after a little reflection, I began to have doubts. The constant drop will wear a hole in the hardest stone, and will also empty the largest cistern, if time be allowed it; and six months was a long time—nearly two hundred days—a very long time.

As I reflected thus, I grew a little uneasy as to the quantity both of my food and drink; and to put an end to all doubt upon the subject, I came to the above determination of measuring them. I recognized the prudence of such a course. If it turned out that there were plenty of both, and to spare, I should no longer be troubled with doubts; and if, on the other hand, there was a danger of either running short, I should then adopt the only precaution possible, and at once put myself on *short rations*!

When I look back, and think of my cunning at this early age, I am now astonished at it; but it is surprising what forethought even a child will exhibit,

when placed in circumstances where self-preservation calls forth all its instincts and energies.

Without more ado, then, I proceeded to make my calculation. I allowed for time, the full six months ; or in other terms, a period of 183 days. I did not even subtract the time—about a week, since we had set sail. That I set aside to my advantage, allowing the full period of 183 days, lest I might err by making the time too short. Surely, in six months, the vessel would reach her port, and her cargo be discharged ? Surely, I might depend upon this ?

No, not surely. I was far from being confident on this head. I knew that a voyage to Peru was usually reckoned a six months' voyage ; but I was not certain whether this was considered the average time ; whether it would be accounted a long voyage or a short one ; and, therefore, I had no confidence in basing my calculation on such uncertain data.

There was the danger of delay from calms in the tropical latitudes, through which we should have to pass—from storms off Cape Horn, renowned among mariners for the fickleness of its wind—other obstacles might be encountered, and the voyage protracted far beyond the period above mentioned.

I was not without such apprehensions, as I proceeded to examine my resources. To ascertain how long my stock of food would last, was simple and easy. I had only to count the biscuits, and find out their number. I knew their size, and that I could live on two a day, though I was not likely to grow fat on the allowance. Even one a day, or still less than that, would sustain life ; and I resolved to be as sparing of them as I could.

I soon ascertained the exact number. The box, as nearly as I could guess, was about a yard long and two feet wide, by about one foot in depth ; for I noticed that it was a shallow one set upon its edge. Had I known its exact dimensions, I could have told

the number of biscuits without counting them. Each was a little less than six inches in diameter, and of an average thickness of three-fourths of an inch. Therefore, packed as they had been, there would be exactly 32 dozen in the case.

But counting them over one by one was no labour, on the contrary, it afforded pleasure to me; and drawing them forth out of the box, I told them off in dozens. I found that 32 dozen *was* the number, wanting eight; but the odd eight I was able to account for satisfactorily. I knew where *they* had gone.

Thirty-two dozen would make 384 biscuits; and, now that I had eaten eight of them, there remained exactly 376; which, at the rate of two per diem, would last for 188 days. True, 188 days would be a little over six months, but as I had not a clear confidence about the length of the voyage being only six months, I perceived that I must go on short rations, of less than two biscuits a day.

What, thought I, if there should be another box of biscuits behind the one I had emptied? That would secure me against all chances, and make my mind easy at once and for ever. What if there should be another? Was it unlikely? No: the reverse. In the stowage of a ship's hold, there is not much order observed as regards the sort of goods that are placed in juxta-position, but rather is regard paid to the size and shape of the packages; and things of a miscellaneous kind are often stowed together, according to convenience, as the particular piece—whether box, bale, or barrel—may fit into a particular space. Notwithstanding that I knew all this, still it was probable enough that two boxes of biscuits had been placed side by side.

How was I to ascertain? I could not get round the box, even now that I had emptied it; for, as already stated, it blocked up the whole aperture

through which I had originally squeezed myself. Neither could I get over the top nor under it.

‘Ha!’ I exclaimed, as a thought suddenly suggested itself, ‘I shall go *through* it.’

The idea was feasible enough. The board which I had already pulled off, left an aperture wide enough to admit my body. This had been part of the top or lid. I could, therefore, get my head and shoulders inside, and with my knife cut a large hole in the bottom opposite. That would enable me to ascertain whether another biscuit-box was beyond.

I was not slow in putting my new design into execution. I first widened a little more the aperture in the top, so that I could work more conveniently; and then I attacked the bottom with my knife. The soft deal yielded pretty freely, but I had not made much progress in this way, when a better plan came into my head. I perceived that the bottom boards of the case were only nailed on—perhaps a little more securely than those of the top, but still not fast enough to resist the blows of a mallet or hammer. I had neither one nor the other, but I thought of a tolerable substitute—my heels. Laying myself, therefore, in a horizontal position, and placing my hands against the great rib to act as a support, I thrust both my feet inside the box. In this position I was able to administer such a series of lusty kicks upon the bottom boards, that one of them soon sprung its nails, and was pressed outward, until I felt it could be driven no farther on account of some weighty impediment beyond.

I now got back to my old position, and examined the progress I had made. I saw that I had dislodged a wide board, so far as the nails were concerned; but it still stood upright, and prevented me feeling what was behind it.

Using all my strength, I succeeded in pressing it to one side and then downward, until an aperture

was obtained, through which I could thrust my hands. Sure enough, a box was on the other side—a rough packing-case, resembling that I had just broken through—but whether of like contents had yet to be determined. It would not take long to tell what it contained. I once more exerted my strength, and succeeded in pressing the loose board quite into a horizontal position, so that it no longer obstructed me. The other box was scarce two inches beyond ; and falling to upon it with my blade, I soon penetrated through its side.

Alas ! my hopes of finding more biscuit were doomed to disappointment. Some woollen substance—either coarse cloth or blankets closely packed—filled the inside, feeling as solid to the touch as a piece of timber. There were no biscuits there ; and I was now convinced I should have to take to the short rations, and make the best of what I already possessed.

CHAPTER XXIX

GAUGING THE WATER-CASK

My next operation was to put all the biscuits back into the box, for strewed loosely about as they were, they interfered seriously with the accommodation of my cabin, which by their bulk was diminished more than half. In fact, I had scarce room to turn myself in, so long as they remained outside the case, and I therefore lost no time in restoring them to their former place of deposit. To make the box hold them all, I was obliged to pack them in regular rows, as they had been before ; with this difference, that the case having been tilted on its side, the biscuits had been lying with their edges in a horizontal position, whereas I now built them vertically—the proper mode of packing such goods, and the way in which they had been placed when they came from the stores of the baker. Of course, it mattered not which way, as regards the space they would take up. On the flat side, or on their edges, it was all the same ; and when I counted in the thirty-one dozen and four odd, the box was full, with only a little empty space in the corner, which the eight missing biscuits had formerly occupied.

So, then, I had taken stock of my larder, and now knew the exact amount of provision I had to depend upon. With two biscuits *per diem* I could stand siege for a little better than six months. It would not be high living, yet I resolved to do with even less, for I could not feel certain that six months would be the full period of my privations. I formed the

resolution to make two a-day the rule, and never to exceed that number ; and on such days as I felt best able to bear hunger, I should stint my measure a quarter or half a biscuit, or even a whole one, if I found it possible. This economic purpose, if successfully carried out, would throw forward the day of absolute want to a much longer period than six months.

My food being thus rationed out, it appeared equally necessary that I should know the quantity of water I might use each day. To ascertain this, at first appeared to be beyond my power. Apparently I had no means of measuring what remained in the butt. It was an old wine or spirit cask—for such are the vessels generally used on board ships to carry water for their crews—but what kind of wine-cask I could not tell, and therefore I could not even guess at the quantity it might have contained when full. Could I only have established this point, I should then have been able to make a rough calculation as to what had been already spent ; rough, but perhaps sufficiently precise for my purpose.

I remembered well the *table of liquid measure*—I had good reason to remember it—the most difficult of all the tables to commit to memory. I had received many a smart rodding, before I was able to repeat it over ; but I at length succeeded in getting it *pit-pat*.

I knew that wine-casks are of very different dimensions, according to the sort of wine they contain : that under the different names of ‘ pipes ’, ‘ butts ’, ‘ hogsheads ’, ‘ puncheons ’, ‘ tuns ’, and ‘ pieces ’, they hold more or less, from the hogshead of hock of thirty gallons to the great tun of wine containing 252. That the spirits—brandy, whiskey, rum, gin ; and the wines—sherry, Port, Madeira, Teneriffe, Malaga, and many other sorts, are transported in casks of different capacity, but usually containing about 100 gallons. I even remembered the number of gallons of each, so well had my teacher—a great

statistician—drilled me in ‘liquid measure’; and could I only have known what sort of wine had once been carried inside of my water-butt, I could have told its measure in a moment. I fancied there was the ‘bouquet’ of sherry about it, and that would have made it a ‘pipe’ of 108 gallons; but it might have been a Madeira pipe, which holds only 92, or Cape, or Marsala, which are about the same size. It might have been Port, which would have stretched its capacity to 115, or a puncheon of Scotch whiskey, some of which contain 120 gallons. I did not think it had been this last, else I should have known the peculiar ‘twang’ which Scotch whiskey gives to water, however diluted it may be. Certainly, there was a perceptible flavour of some liquor, but I was too young to be experienced in drinks, and I learnt nothing from this. No doubt a wine-taster could have told in an instant what sort had formerly filled the barrel, for an old wine-cask will retain the particular ‘bouquet’ of the wine it had carried after performing several voyages as a water-butt.

I drew out the stopper, and tasted the water. I had not thought of noticing its flavour before. It appeared to me to be sherry; but as I have said, it might be Madeira, which would make a difference of sixteen gallons—an important item in a calculation such as I was desirous of making. I therefore could not trust to my judgment to make this the basis of a computation, and I had to think of some other device.

Fortunately in my school arithmetic there were a few hints upon mensuration, and the good master had instructed us in these.

I have often wondered that the simple but useful problems of this branch of science are so much neglected, while the most useless and irrational rhymes are hammered into the heads of poor unfortunate boys. I have no hesitation in giving my opinion, that a knowledge of simple mensuration, which may be

obtained in a week's study, is of more value to an individual—or to the whole human race, if you will—than a perfect scholarship in all the dead languages of the world. Greek and Latin! These have been very barriers to the advancement of knowledge!

Well, I was saying that my old teacher had taught me a few simple problems in mensuration; and fortunately I still held them in my memory. I could tell the solid contents of a cube, of a parallelopipedon, of a pyramid, of a globe (nearly), of a cylinder, and of a *cone*. The last was the figure that now interested me.

I knew that a barrel was a pair of cones—that is, truncated cones or *frustums*—with the bases resting against each other. Of course, when I was taught how to measure a cone, I was also instructed to do the same with the frustum of one.

To ascertain the capacity of my butt, therefore, it was only necessary for me to know its length—or its half-length would do as well—its circumference at either end, and also its circumference around the thickest part or 'swell'. These three measurements given me, I could tell to a quart how much water would fill it—in other words, I could calculate how many cubic inches of water it should contain. Knowing this, I should simply have to divide by 69 and a small fraction over, and this would give me the number of quarts, which another simple division of 4 would reduce to gallons, if I required to use this standard.

I perceived, therefore, that if I could get the three measurements, I could soon tell the capacity of my butt; but therein lay the difficulty. How were these measurements to be obtained?

I might have obtained the length, for that was before me from end to end; but how should I get the circumference either of the middle or of either end? I could not reach over the top, nor around the ends. Both directions were blocked up against me.

Another difficulty stared me in the face. I had nothing wherewith to measure them—neither rule nor tape—no standard by which I could determine the number of feet or inches ; so that even had all sides been free to me, I should still have been in a dilemma.

I was determined, however, not to yield the point until I had given it a good thinking. The occupation would help me to pass the time ; and, as I have already hinted, this was a matter of primary importance. Besides, that faithful old schoolmaster had many a time impressed upon us the valuable truth, that perseverance often finds success where success appears impossible. Remembering this bit of admonition, I resolved not to regard the thing as impracticable, until I had exhausted all my powers of contrivance.

I persevered, therefore, and in less time than I must take in describing it, I hit upon a plan for ‘gauging’ the butt.

CHAPTER XXX

MY MEASURING-RULE

THE details of my plan suggested themselves in the following order :—

While examining the cask, to find if there was not some means of ascertaining its different diameters, I discovered the very way itself. All I wanted was a straight rod or stick, of sufficient length to reach quite across the butt at its thickest part. It was plain to me, that by inserting such a stick into a hole in one side of the cask, and passing it on till it touched the staves on the other side, at a point diametrically opposite, I could thus obtain the exact measurement of the diameter of that part of the vessel, since the portion of the rod reaching from side to side would be the diameter itself. The diameter once obtained, it needed only to multiply by three to get the circumference. But in the calculation which I was desirous of making, it was the diameter itself I wanted to find, and not the circumference. I only thought of the latter, because, under ordinary circumstances, when a cask is bunged up, it is easier to measure the circumference of the swell than its diameter. In no case does it signify which, as the figure three will always reduce the one to the other, near enough for most practical purposes, though not mathematically exact.

Now, it so chanced that one of the holes I had cut through the staves had been made in the very middle of the swell, where the butt was thickest. Therefore a straight stick passed into this hole, and pushed

on till it touched the opposite side, would give the greatest diameter of the cask.

You may imagine that this might have been obtained by simply planting the stick in a vertical position *outside* the butt, and notching it at a point on a level with the top of the vessel. True, this might have been done had I been operating with a barrel lying upon a plain surface, with nothing around it to obstruct me, and plenty of light to observe the true level. Even thus it would have been rough guess work, and not to be depended on when a calculation was to be made involving life or death in its consequences—for such it really did involve—at least, I supposed so. But the butt was so placed, resting upon the timbers of the ship, with its swollen side sunk between them, that I could not have measured it in this manner. Even though I might have marked a rod on a line with its top, I could not have planted the other end so as to be on a level with its base.

There seemed no other way to get at the thing than by inserting a straight stick into the hole, and thus measure the diameter; nor did I trouble myself about any other, as this appeared to be the best plan I could adopt.

Where was I to find my stick—my measuring-rule? That is your question, is it not?

It is easily answered. The deal board that had formed part of the biscuit-box would supply me with the material, and out of that I could soon make one. No sooner thought of than I set about it.

The board was but a little over two feet in length, and of course not long enough to reach across the great cask, which at its thickest part appeared four or five. But a very little ingenuity sufficed to overcome this obstacle. I should only have to split off three thin pieces, and by splicing their ends together, I should get a stick of length sufficient.

I did so. Fortunately, the deal was cut nicely

with the grain of the wood ; and in splitting it, I guided the blade of my knife so as not to let it run out at the edges.

I succeeded in getting three pieces of the thickness I wanted ; and, after shaving off their angles, and making them clean and trim, I cut their ends with a slant for the splice.

The next thing was to obtain two pieces of string, and this was the easiest thing in the world. I wore upon my feet a pair of little 'buskins' that laced up to the very ankle. The laces were thongs of calf-skin, each of them a full yard long. They were just the thing ; and, drawing them out of the holes, I completed the splicing, and now held in my hands a straight stick full five feet in length—quite long enough, I conceived, to reach across the thickest part of the butt, and slender enough to go into the hole—which I had already widened a little to receive it.

'So far good' thought I ; 'I shall now insert the measuring-stick, and find my diameter.'

I rose to my feet to carry out this design, but I need not describe the mortification I felt on perceiving that the first of these operations, which would appear to be the simplest of all, could not be performed. At the first trial I saw that it was quite impossible. It was not because the hole was too small, or the stick too large. I had made no mistake about this ; but my miscalculation was in regard to the space in which I had to work. Lengthways my little chamber was nearly six feet, but crossways little more than two ; and up where the hole was—in which I intended to insert the measuring-rod—it was still less. Of course to get the stiff piece of stick into the cask was plainly impossible—without bending it, so that it must break—for the dry deal would have snapped through like the shank of a clay pipe.

I was a good deal chagrined at not having thought of this before ; but I was still more vexed at the idea of

being obliged to abandon the design of making the measurement I had intended, for before reflecting I believed that this was to be the result. A little further consideration, however, helped to a new plan, proving the importance of not arriving too hastily at conclusions. I discovered a way of getting in the stick to its full length, without either breaking or bending it.

This could be effected by taking it to pieces again, then first inserting one of the pieces, and holding it till the second could be spliced on to its end, and then pushing both into the cask, and joining the third piece in a similar fashion.

About this there appeared no difficulty, and the result proved there was none; for in less than five minutes after conceiving it, I had carried the design into execution, and the measuring-rod stood inside the barrel, with one end projecting some inches on the outside.

Holding this end carefully in my hand, I caused the other to play about on the opposite side, until I felt convinced that it touched the point that was exactly *vis-à-vis* with the aperture; and then steadying the stick, I notched it with my knife, on a level with the outer surface of the stave. To calculate from this notch would not be correct, as it would be more than the diameter of the cask—that is, in reference to what it would contain—but I had no intention of doing so. I should make allowance for the thickness of the stave, and that would give me the measurement I wanted.

Having made my mark, I drew forth my measuring-rod, piece by piece, as it had been plunged in. I took care as I did so to notch both the splices, so that I might be able to put them together again in the exact place where they had been while making the measurement. All this attention to such minute particulars was of importance, and I knew it to be so, for the mistake of even a quarter of an inch in the length of my diameter would cause a difference of many gallons in

the result. Most certainly, then, was it of consequence that I should be precise in my *data*.

I now had the diameter of the swell ; the next thing was to get that of the head, or end. About this there was less difficulty—in fact, not any. It was obtained in a few seconds.

Though I could not myself get round either of the ends of the butt, nor even my arm, I could pass the rod around them, and in this way measure them. Even had there not been space to admit the measuring-stick, I should have found a means—by simply [drilling another hole with my knife, close to either end, and gauging as before. But this would have occupied time, and it was not necessary to do so, since the stick passed along the head of the butt without any obstruction, till its end rested against the projecting rim on the opposite side. I had nothing to do but assure myself that its point was fair in the middle, and then make my mark as before.

The length of the butt was yet to be ascertained ; and this, though apparently a simple operation, cost me a good deal of consideration, before I could get at it with any degree of exactness. You may fancy that it would have been easy enough to get at the length, by just placing the stick parallel to the cask, and notching it square with the ends of the latter ? And so it might be easy enough, with plenty of light around you to see when it *was* square, and a level surface upon which to rest your measure. But as I had the advantage neither of light nor level ground, I encountered great difficulty in this operation. I could not tell when the ends lay even with each other, merely by the touch. I had to pass my fingers from one to the other, and could not grasp both at one time—that is, the rim of the cask and the end of the rod—since they must needs be several inches apart. The stick, too, lay unsteady, and by the feel I could not be sure when its end was exactly ‘ flush ’ with the head of

the cask. The mistake of an inch—it might be several—would falsify all my computations, and render them of no use. It would not do to proceed upon such a conjectural basis, and for a while I was puzzled, and had to pause.

This was an unexpected obstacle, for I had from the first regarded the diameters as the only difficulty; about the possibility of obtaining the length, I had never entertained a doubt.

But my wits again came to the rescue, and I soon discovered a plan that would effect the end in view. I had to make another rod—by splicing two more lengths split from the board—and with this I was able to determine the point.

I managed the matter thus: The old rod I pushed along the head of the cask quite beyond its outer edge, so that it rested at both ends against the projecting rim. Thus placed, it was exactly parallel with the plane of the barrel's head, while a foot or more projected outward and towards me. Holding the end of the second rod against this projecting part, and at right angles, I gave it a direction along the side of the cask, and I was able to mark the point, where the middle part of the swell came in contact with the second rod. This, of course, after deducting the depth of the rim and the presumed thickness of the head, gave me half the length of the interior of the cask, and that was all I wanted, since two halves make one whole.

I was now in possession of the *data* of my problem; it only remained for me to seek the solution.

CHAPTER XXXI

‘ QUOD ERAT FACIENDUM ’

To find the cubic contents of the butt in feet or inches, and afterwards reduce them to liquid measure—to gallons or quarts—would have been easy enough, and only required a simple computation in figures. I knew that I was arithmetician enough to make this computation, even though I possessed neither pen nor paper, slate nor pencil ; and if I had, there was no light by which I could have used them. ‘ Ciphering ’, therefore, in the ordinary way, was out of the question ; but I had often practised myself in casting up accounts by a mental process, and I could add and subtract, multiply or divide a considerable series of figures without the aid of either pen or pencil. The problem I had before me would involve but a limited number of figures, and I felt satisfied I could easily manage it, so far as that was concerned.

I have said that it *would have been* a simple and easy computation to find the contents of the cask in cubic feet or inches. *Would have been* supposes that there was a difficulty—and there *was* one. An, important preliminary matter had to be settled before I could enter upon any calculation—a very important one ; and that was, that I had not yet reduced my measurements—neither the diameters nor the length—to feet and inches ! I had measured the cask with plain pieces of stick, and had registered the dimensions in simple notches ; but what of this ? I knew not what distance these notches might be from the

end, or from each other—how many feet or inches ! I might make a rude guess, but that would be of no service to me ; so that after all my pains I had as yet no *data* to go upon, nor could I have any until I had first *measured my measuring-rods themselves !*

Apparently, here was a difficulty not to be got over. Considering that I had no standard of measurement within reach—neither yard-stick, nor foot-rule, nor graduated scale of any kind—you will naturally conclude that I must have abandoned the problem. A computation founded on the mere length of the stick would have been absurd, and could have given me no information whatever upon the point about which I wanted to be informed. To find the cubic and liquid contents of the cask, I must first have its length, with its largest and shortest diameters, expressed in *standard* terms—that is, either in feet or inches, or some other divisions of a scale.

And how, I ask, was this to be ascertained, when I possessed no standard of measurement about my person ? None whatever. I could not make one ; for in order to do so, I should have required another for a guide. Of course, I could not *guess* the length either of feet or inches.

How, then, was I to proceed ?

Apparently, the difficulty was not to be got over. The thing seemed impracticable.

To you it may seem so, but it did not to me. I had thought of this before. I should not have proceeded as far as I had done—taking so much pains and trouble with the splitting and splicing of my sticks, and making my measurements so exact—had I not foreseen this difficulty, and thought of a way to surmount it. All this had been prospectively arranged. I knew before-hand that I *could measure* my sticks, and tell their linear dimensions to the exactness of an inch.

‘ How ? ’

Thus, then—

When I said just a little ago that I had no standard about my person, I spoke the truth only literally. Although not exactly *about* my person, I had one *in* my person—I was myself that standard! You will now remember my having submitted myself to a measurement, which showed me to be four feet in length. Of what value that knowledge now proved to me!

Knowing, then, my own height to be very nearly four feet, I could notch off that measure upon one of the sticks, which would give me a measuring-rule of four feet in length.

I proceeded to obtain this result without delay. The process was simple and easy. Laying myself horizontally, I planted my feet against one of the great ribs of the ship, and rested the end of the stick between them. I now stretched myself out at full length, and guiding the rod so as to keep it parallel to the axis of my body, I brought it across my forehead, and beyond. With my fingers I could tell the point that was opposite the crown of my head, and carefully marking this point, I afterwards notched it with the knife. I now possessed a four-foot rule, exact enough for my purpose.

But there were difficulties yet to be encountered. With a four-foot rule, I was but little advanced towards my computation. I might make a nearer approach to the measurement of my diameters, but that would not avail. I must know them *exactly*. I must know them in inches, and even fractions of inches; for, as I have said, an error of half an inch in some of my *data* would make a difference of gallons in the result. How, then, was I to divide a four-foot stick into inches, and register the inches upon its edge? How was this to be done?

It seems simple enough. The half of my four feet—already ascertained—would give me two feet; and

the half of that again would reduce the standard to a foot. This again notched in the middle would make two lengths of six inches each. Then I could subdivide those into lengths of three inches, which, if not small enough for my calculation, could be still further subdivided into three equal parts, each of which would be the desired minimum of an inch.

Yes, all this seems easy enough in theory, but how was it to be put in practice upon a piece of plain straight stick, and in the midst of as perfect darkness as that which surrounds a blind man? How was I to find the exact middle—for it must be exact—of even the four feet, much less divide and subdivide till I got down to the inches?

I confess that I was puzzled for awhile, and had to pause and reflect.

Not very long, however; I was soon able to get over this trifling obstacle.

The plan that first suggested itself was to cut a third piece of stick of a little over two feet in length, which I could easily guess at within a few inches. This I could apply alongside of my four-foot rule, beginning at the end, and proceeding as if I was measuring the latter with the former. Of course, on the first application, two lengths would reach from the end of the rule to the notch that marked the four-feet length, and perhaps extend a little beyond. I should then shorten the measure and apply it again. This time its end would have approached nearer to the aforesaid notch. Another bit cut off would bring it still nearer; and the process being repeated, by shaving gradually from the end of the stick, I should at last find that two lengths of it would exactly correspond with the length of my four-foot rule. I should then have a piece exactly two feet in length, and by the help of this I could find the middle part of the longer piece, and could mark it with a 'nick'.

By cutting the short piece into two nearly equal

parts, I could then take the larger of them, and, by a similar process, obtain the standard of a foot, and mark it also upon my rule ; and so on till I had succeeded in arriving at the inches.

Of course, to do all this would require time, patience, and the nicest precision ; but I had plenty of time upon my hands, and it was my interest to be both patient and precise.

Although I regarded not the time, just as I was about to carry out the plan described, another suggested itself that promised to lead me sooner to the issue ; it would call for less patience, though an equal amount of precision.

This new plan was a sort of corollary of the former one, the only difference being, that instead of a *stick* I should perform my subdivision and graduation with a *string*.

The thongs of my buskins came into my mind—the very thing !

I could not have found a better string for the purpose. They were strips of best calf-skin, cut with the grain, and could not have been stretched the eighth part of an inch. They would, therefore, measure as accurately as a rule of boxwood or ivory.

One would not be long enough ; so I knotted the two together, taking care to make a neat, firm knot of it. They made a string of over four feet, and having laid it along the four-foot rule, I cut it with my knife to that length exactly. I was not satisfied till I had measured it over and over again, each time pulling the thong with all my strength, lest some ‘ kink ’ might be lurking in it. A slight error would derange my intended scale, though there is less danger in graduating four feet down to inches than in going from the less to the greater standard. In the former, each subdivision naturally lessens the error, while in the latter it is continually doubled.

When convinced that I had got the thong to the

precise length, I placed its two ends together, and then drawing it with a firm pull through my fingers, I creased it exactly in the middle. Holding it taut upon the blade of my knife, I cut through at the crease, and thus divided it into two moieties of equal length, each two feet long. The part with the knot I laid aside as being no longer needed, and the remaining half I again doubled, and cut into two. This gave me two pieces each a foot in length.

One of these I next folded in triple, and creased for cutting as before. This was a delicate operation, and required all the skill of my fingers to accomplish, for it is much easier to divide a string into two equal parts than into three. I was a good long time before I could get it trebled to my satisfaction ; but I succeeded at length, and then severed the parts.

My object in thus cutting into three, was to get the pieces in even fractions of four inches each, in order that by two more doublings I might arrive more accurately at the inch.

And in two more doublings I found it.

To make sure that I had committed no error, I took up the knotted piece, which I had laid aside, and after placing the other fragments where they could be got at, I reduced the second half of the string as I had done the first.

To my gratification, the inch I obtained from both exactly corresponded. There was not a hair's breadth of difference.

I was now in possession of a guide to the true graduation of my measuring-stick. I had pieces of one foot, of four inches, of two, and of one ; and by the help of these I proceeded to mark my rod after the manner of a draper's yard-stick.

It occupied some time, for I worked with care and caution ; but my patience was rewarded by finding myself in possession of a measure upon which I could rely, even in a calculation involving the question of my life.

I was not much longer in deciding the point. The diameters were now measured by feet and inches, and the *mean* of the two taken. This was reduced to surface measure by the usual method of squaring the circle (multiplying by eight, and dividing by ten). This gave the base of the hollow cylinder, which would be equal to the frustum of a cone of like altitude ; and another multiplication by the length produced the entire cubic content.

Dividing by sixty-nine, I got the number of quarts, and so gallons.

The butt, when full, had contained somewhat above 100 gallons—as near as I could calculate, about 108—and therefore it was in all likelihood an old pipe that had once contained sherry.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE HORROR OF DARKNESS

THE result of my calculation was of the most satisfactory nature. Eighty gallons of water would give half a gallon each day for 160 days, or a quart *per diem* for 320 days—nearly a whole year! Surely I could subsist on a quart a day?—surely the voyage could not last for so long a period as 320 days? A ship might sail round the world in less time. I remembered having been told so, and it was fortunate I remembered it, for my mind was now at ease on the score of water. For all that, I resolved not to drink more than a quart a day, and on this allowance I made no doubt that the supply would be sufficient.

There was more danger of running short of food; but, upon the whole, I now felt very little apprehension, as I had fully resolved to diet myself on the most economic scale.

So far, then, as food and drink were concerned, I felt no further uneasiness. It was well assured that I was not to die either of thirst or starvation; and the very remarkable manner in which both food and drink had been supplied—placed, as it were, before me—naturally led me to the reflection that the hand of Providence had been extended to aid me, and I was still further consoled with the hope that He who had thus mercifully preserved me for the present, would not forsake me in the future.

In this state of feeling I continued for several days, and although it was an irksome life—every hour seem-

ing of itself a day—still I was able to endure it. Sometimes I endeavoured to kill time by counting not only the hours, but even the minutes and seconds ; and in this occupation (for I could think of no other) I often passed several hours at a time. My watch enabled me to amuse myself in this manner, and I found companionship in its cheerful ticking. I fancied that it beat louder than I had ever before heard it, and most likely this was so, the sound being magnified by the wooden walls that surrounded my cell. I took care never to let the watch go to the full length of its chain, lest it might run down and derange my reckoning. Not that I cared to know the hour. That was of no consequence. I did not even know whether it was night or day by the watch, nor would it have mattered had I not known the one from the other, as the brightest sun could not have lent a ray of his light to cheer my dungeon. It chanced, however, that I *did* know the night from the day. No doubt you will wonder how I came by this knowledge—since I had kept no time for the first hundred hours after getting aboard, and there was then, in the complete darkness that surrounded me, no means of distinguishing the one from the other. I had a means of telling, however, and it was this : During all my life I had been trained to the habit of going to bed at a particular hour—ten o'clock at night—and also of rising at six exactly. This was a rule in my father's house, as well as that of my uncle—in the latter, indeed, I was compelled to observe it with a stern exactitude. The consequence of this habit was, that whenever the hour of ten drew nigh, I naturally felt the inclination for sleep ; and the habit had grown so fixed, that, notwithstanding the change of circumstances, it still continued. This I was not slow to observe. I felt the desire to sleep come upon me at regular periods, and I concluded, therefore, that whenever I had this feeling upon me it was about ten o'clock of the night. I had discovered, too, by register-

ing the time with my watch, that I usually slept about eight hours, and then I felt no desire to remain asleep any longer. When I awoke it would be six in the morning; and, in this belief, I regulated my watch to that hour. So convinced was I of these facts, that I felt confident I could have counted the days without the watch; but fearing that some change might occur in my habitual hours of rest, in consequence of the altered circumstances in which I was placed, I resolved always to keep the time-piece going. Ever before lying down to sleep, I took the precaution to wind it up to the full length of its chain, and on awaking I repeated the operation, so that there might be no danger of even a moment's stoppage.

Though satisfied that I could tell night from day, I have said that it mattered little, or not at all. It was of importance, however, that I should know when each twenty-four hours had ended, for it was only by that means I could have any knowledge of the progress of the voyage. I took especial care to count the hours; and whenever I perceived that the hour-hand had completed two circuits around the dial, I cut a fresh notch in a piece of stick, set aside for this especial purpose. I need not say that my registry was kept with the greatest care. The only part of it on which I could not depend was that referring to the first days after my departure, when I had taken no notice whatever of the time that had passed. By guess I had put down four notches against those days and nights, and I afterwards found that my memorandum was correct.

Thus for several days—nearly a week—passed I the hours—the long hours—long, and dark, and irksome: ever more or less miserable, at times sadly dejected, but never positively despairing.

Strange to say, my greatest misery arose from the absence of light. I had at first suffered from my cramped position, and also from lying upon the hard oak timber; but I got used to these inconveniences.

Besides, for the hardness of my bed I soon discovered a remedy. I had observed that the box which stood upon the other side of my biscuit-house contained some sort of stuff that had the feel of woollen goods. On further examination, it proved to be broadcloth, closely packed in large webs as it had come from the manufactory. This suggested an idea that was likely to contribute to my comfort ; and I set about putting it into execution. After removing the biscuits out of my way, I enlarged the hole (which I had already made in the side of the cloth-box) to such an extent that I was able—not without much labour, however—to detach one of the pieces, and draw it out ; and then with less trouble I pulled forth another and another, until I had as much as would serve my purpose. I was two hours in completing this operation, but having got possession of the cloth, and shaken it out of its hard foldings, I procured both carpet and couch soft enough for a king to rest upon ; and perhaps as costly, too—for I could feel that I was handling an article that was ‘superfine’. I did not use more of it than was absolutely required to cover the hard oaken planks. Its bulk would have inconvenienced me had I taken much of it from the box ; and before spreading it out, I had to clear the way, by returning all the biscuits to their old repository.

Having spread my costly couch, I lay down upon it, and felt a great deal more comfortable than I had yet done.

But I still longed for light more than for anything else. It is difficult to conceive the misery of existence under complete darkness ; and I could now well comprehend the reason why the ‘dungeon’ has always been regarded as the most awful punishment which a prisoner can be made to endure. No wonder men’s hair has turned gray, and their senses have forsaken them, under such circumstances ; for in truth darkness is as hard to endure as if light were essential to our existence.

I thought that if I only had a light, I could have passed the time without thinking it half so long. The darkness appeared to me to double the duration of the hours, as though it was something physical and substantial that clogged the wheels of my watch, and hindered the motion of time itself. Amorphous darkness ! I fancied it gave me pain—a pain that light would at once have alleviated ; and sometimes I felt as I had once done before, when laid upon a sick couch counting over the long drear hours of the night, and anxiously watching for the day. In this way slowly, and far from pleasantly, did time pass on.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE STORM

MORE than a week had I spent under this tedious monotony of existence. The only sound that reached my ears was the hoarse rushing of the waves *above* me. Above me—for I knew that I was far down amid their depths, far below the surface of the sea. At long intervals only, I could distinguish other noises, like a thumping upon the decks as if some heavy object was being moved about, and no doubt such was the cause of it. In calm weather I sometimes fancied I could hear the bell calling the men upon their watches, but I was not sure of this. At all events, the sound appeared so distant and indistinct, that I could not positively say it was a bell; and if so, it was only during the calmest weather I could hear it.

I speak of calm weather, for I knew perfectly when there were changes. I could tell the breeze, the gale, the storm—when they commenced and when they ended—just as well as if I had been upon deck. The rolling of the ship, and the creaking of her timbers, were good indices as to how the wind blew, or whether it was rough or mild weather. On the sixth day—that is, the tenth from departure, but the sixth of my register—we encountered a regular storm. It lasted for two days and a night; and must have been a terribly severe one, as it shook the timbers of the vessel as though it would have torn them asunder. At times I really thought that the great ship was going to pieces; and the noises made by huge boxes and casks

striking and grinding against each other, or knocking violently upon the sides and bulwarks of the ship itself, was sufficiently terrible. At intervals, too; I could distinguish the sound of big waves—‘seas’, as the sailors call them—breaking against the vessel with awful crash, as if a huge trip hammer or battering-ram had been directed with full force against the timbers of the ship.

I had no doubt that the vessel was in danger of being wrecked; and under this belief you may fancy my situation. I need not tell you that I was in fear. When I thought that we should go to the bottom of the sea, and I situated as I was—shut in on all sides as if in a coffin—with no chance to move, not even to make an effort to save myself by swimming, how could it be otherwise with me than a time of great fear? Had I been upon deck and free, I am certain I should not have been half so frightened at that storm.

To increase my misery, the sea-sickness had returned upon me, for this is usually the case with those who go to sea on a first voyage. A great storm encountered brings a return of the nauseous malady, often as disagreeably vigorous as that experienced during the first twenty-four hours at sea. This is accounted for very easily: it is simply the consequence of the more violent rocking of the ship while buffeted by the storm.

For nearly forty hours the gale continued, and then there succeeded a perfect calm. I knew this to be the case, because I no longer heard the seething sound which usually betokens that the ship is moving through the water. But notwithstanding that the wind had ceased to blow, the vessel kept tumbling about; and her timbers creaked, and boxes and barrels rolled and knocked each other, as badly as ever. This was occasioned by the ‘swell’ which always succeeds a heavy gale, and which is sometimes as dangerous to vessels as the stormy weather itself. In a very heavy

swell the masts are sometimes broken, and the ship thrown upon her beam-ends—a catastrophe ever dreaded by sailors.

The swell gradually subsided, until, in about twenty-four hours after, it had ceased altogether, and the vessel appeared to glide along more smoothly than ever. The nauseating sickness took its departure about the same time, and I felt the reaction of health, which produced a little cheerfulness within me. As my fears had kept me awake during the whole time the storm was raging, and as I had continued ill so long as the violent rocking prevailed, I was quite worn out; so that the moment things were smooth again, I fell off into a profound slumber.

I had dreams that were nearly as terrible as the realities through which I had been passing. In fact, I dreamt what but the hours before I had been dreading. I dreamt that I was being drowned, and just under the circumstances in which I was—shut up in the hold without the chance of swimming a stroke for my life. Nay more, I dreamt that I actually *was* drowned, and lying at the bottom of the sea—that I was dead, but not unconscious. On the contrary, I could see well around me, and perceived, among other things, horrible green monsters—crabs or lobsters—crawling towards me, as if with the design of tearing me with their hideous claws, and feasting on my flesh! One, in particular, drew my attention, larger and more spiteful-looking than the rest, and closer to me than any. Each instant, too, he was drawing nearer and nearer. I thought he had reached my hand, and I could feel him crawling upon it. I could feel the cold harsh touch as he dragged his unwieldy shape over my fingers, but I could not move either hand or finger to cast him off.

On he came over my wrist and straight up my arm, which was lying outstretched from my body. He appeared as if determined to attack me in the face or the throat. I read his intention to do so from the

eagerness with which he advanced, but despite the horror I felt, I could do nothing to repel him. I could not move hand or arm—nor a muscle of my body. How could I, since I was drowned and dead? ‘Ha! he is on my breast—at my very throat—he will soon clutch me—ha!’

I awoke with a shriek, and started upward. I would have risen to my feet, had there been room to stand erect. As it was, there was not room; and a blow which I received by dashing my head against the great oak rib of the vessel, brought me back to my couch, and, after some moments, to a consciousness of my situation.

CHAPTER XXXIV

A NOVEL DRINKING-CUP

NOTWITHSTANDING that it was all a dream, and that no crab could possibly have crept up my arm—notwithstanding that I was now awake, and knew I had been only dreaming about it—I could not help fancying that a crab *actually had been crawling over me*—a crab or some other creature. I felt that peculiar tingling sensation along my arm and upon my breast, which was quite open and bare, that might be produced by the claws of some small animal creeping over one, and I could not help thinking that there had been *something*!

So convinced was I of this, that on awaking I flung out my arms mechanically, and groped all over the spread broadcloth, and around the edges of my lurking-place, expecting to lay them upon some *living creature*!

Half asleep, I still believed it *was* a crab; but as my senses became clearer, I reasoned upon the improbability of there being one in such a place. And yet, why not? A crab might very well find lodgment in the hold of a ship: it might have been brought aboard in some strange way—among the ballast—or possibly carried aboard by some of the sailors, out of curiosity; it may have been abandoned to its fate, and left to hide itself among the numerous corners and crevices which are found among the timbers of a vessel's hold? It might procure sustenance in the bilge-water, or in the ballast rubbish, or perhaps, like the chameleon, crabs could exist on air?

I had such thoughts, but only for a few moments after awaking ; and as I reasoned further on the matter, I abandoned them. It could only be my dream that had made me think of crabs at all. But for that, the thought of such a creature would not have entered my mind. There could have been no crab, else I should have laid my hands upon it ; for I had lost no time in groping over the surface of my cloth carpeting—every inch of it—and I found nothing there. There were but two crevices leading out of my cell, by which a crab of any considerable size could have entered or escaped ; and I had felt these places at the very first moment. So slow a traveller could not have passed through either of them in so short a time ! No, there could have been no crab ; and yet there *was something*, certainly—something had crawled over me. I could not be convinced of the contrary.

I lay for a long time pondering over the subject of my dream. The unpleasant feeling which it had occasioned me soon passed away. It was very natural I should have dreamt what I did, since it was almost the same thing I had been thinking of during the continuance of the storm.

On examining my watch, I found that I had considerably overslept myself, having been unconscious for nearly sixteen hours ! This prolonged slumber was the result of my having been kept so long awake by the storm, and the sickness that it had occasioned me.

I now felt more hungry than I had done for days, and at once set about satisfying that appetite. Strive as I would, I could not resist the temptation of eating more than my allotted ration, and I did not leave off till I had eaten four of my precious biscuits. I had been told that nothing creates so keen an appetite as a turn of sea-sickness, and I found this to be truth. Indeed, I felt as if I could have consumed the whole of my stock, and the four biscuits I ate scarcely took the edge well off my hunger. Nothing but the dread of

running short hindered me from eating three times as many.

I was also in great thirst, and swallowed far more than my allowance of water ; but I was not so careful of this, as I believed it would be quite sure to last me to the end of the voyage. One thing about the water troubled me not a little. Each time that I went to take a drink, a considerable waste took place, in consequence of my having no vessel to draw it in ; and, moreover, to drink from the hole I had made was altogether an unsatisfactory way of quenching my thirst. As soon as the peg was drawn out, a strong jet would shoot forth, to which I applied my mouth. But I could not swallow it as fast as it came, and it was sure—after taking away my breath, and half choking me—to squirt all over my face, wetting my clothes and everything else about me, before I could get the stopper back into its place.

If I only had had a vessel to draw it in—a cup or anything ?

I thought of using one of my buskins, for I had no need for them otherwise ; but I felt some qualms about making this use of them.

I should not have hesitated to have drunk out of them, or any other vessel, when pressed by thirst previous to my having tapped the butt ; but now that I had water in plenty, the case was different. Still, I could get one of them sufficiently clean for the purpose. Better, thought I, to waste a little water in washing one of them, than lose a large quantity every time I went to drink.

I was about to put this design into execution, when a better idea came into my head—that was to make a drinking-cup out of a piece of broadcloth. This was altogether better. I had already observed that the cloth was waterproof—at least, the water that was spilt from the butt appeared to lie upon it without passing through—for I had been obliged to shake it off on each

occasion. A piece of the cloth, therefore, formed into a cup shape, would be likely enough to serve my purpose ; and accordingly I resolved to make me such a vessel.

It needed only to cut a broad strip with my knife, roll it up, as if I was intending it for a funnel—taking care to fold it of several thicknesses of the cloth. When rolled, I bound it in its place with a fragment of the thong from my buskins, and I thus succeeded in making me a drinking-vessel, which would, and *did*, serve me as well as if it had been of best china or glass. I was henceforth enabled to take a drink more to my satisfaction, and without wasting the precious fluid upon which my life depended.

CHAPTER XXXV

MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE

As I had eaten so many biscuits for breakfast, I intended to make breakfast serve me for that day ; but, hungering as I was, I could not carry out my good intent. About mid-day, I found myself groping at the box, and the result was, that I abstracted another biscuit. I resolved, however, to eat only half of it for dinner, and keep the other half for supper.

Following out this resolution, I broke the biscuit across the middle, and laid one half aside. The other I ate, washing it down with a little more water.

You may think it strange that I did not fancy a little brandy along with it, which I might have had without any trouble, since there were at least a hundred gallons of it within reach. The brandy, however, was nothing to me ; and the great cask might as well have contained vitriol, for aught I cared for it. There were several reasons why I did not meddle with it. First, because I did not relish it ; second, because it made me feel sick, and nauseated both my palate and stomach. I suppose it had been of an inferior kind, intended, not as an article of commerce, but for the use of the sailors, as casks of very bad brandy and rum are carried in most ships for the use of the crew. A third reason why I kept clear of the brandy was, that I had already drunk of it—only about one wine-glassful—and it had the effect of making me so thirsty that I drank nearly half a gallon of water before I succeeded in fully quenching my thirst

again. I reasoned, therefore, that if I touched the brandy, it would cause me, either great suffering from thirst, or that I should have to use more water than I could spare. Therefore it was, that I determined to abstain altogether from this alcoholic spirit.

When my watch warned me that it was my usual hour to go to sleep, I resolved to eat the odd half biscuit, which I had reserved for supper; and then 'retire for the night'.

This operation consisted simply in stretching myself in a new position, and drawing a fold or two of the broadcloth over me, to keep me from getting chilled while asleep.

For the first week after leaving port, I had found it very cold, for it was the winter season when we left home. The cloth, however, after it was discovered, enabled me to wrap up snugly enough, and I no longer cared for the cold. After a time, however, I began to perceive that the cold had quite taken its departure, and each day and night the atmosphere in the hold of the ship appeared to be growing warmer. On the night after the storm had passed, it did not feel at all cold, and the slightest covering sufficed.

At first, I was surprised by this sudden change in the state of the atmosphere; but when I reflected a little, I was able to explain it to my satisfaction. 'Beyond a doubt', thought I, 'we have been all the while sailing southward, and we are getting into the hot latitudes of the torrid zone'.

I knew but little of what that meant, but I had heard that the torrid zone—or the tropics, as it was also called—lay to the south of England; and that there the climate was hotter than the hottest summer day at home. I had also heard that Peru was a southern country, and therefore we must be going in a southerly direction to reach it.

This was a very good explanation of the warm weather that had set in. The ship had now been

sailing for nearly two weeks ; and allowing her to have made two hundred miles a day (and ships, I knew, often go faster than that), she would at this time be a long way from England, and in a different climate altogether.

Thus reasoning with myself, I contrived to pass that afternoon and evening, and as I felt the hands of my watch indicating the hour of ten, I resolved, as already stated, to eat the half biscuit, and then go to sleep.

I first drew a cup of water, so that the biscuit might not be eaten dry ; and, this done, I stretched forth my hand for the bread. I knew the exact spot where it lay, for I had a little corner, just alongside the great beam, where I kept my knife and cup, and wooden almanack—a sort of little shelf, raised by a roll of the cloth above the common level of my cell. There I had placed the half biscuit, and there, of course, I could lay my hand upon it as well without a light as with one. So perfectly had I become acquainted with every corner of my apartment, and every crevice leading from it, that I could place my finger on any given spot of the size of a crown-piece, without the slightest deviation.

I reached forth my hand, then, to clutch the precious morsel. Judge my astonishment when I touched the spot where I supposed it to be lying, and found *it was not there !*

At first, I fancied I might be mistaken—that perhaps I had not left it in the usual place on my shelf. There it certainly was not.

I felt the cloth cup, for that was in my hand full of water. The knife was in its place—so, too, the little notched stick, and the pieces of the string which I had used in measuring the butt—but no half biscuit !

Could I have put it anywhere else ? I thought not ; and yet, to make sure, I felt all over the bottom of my cell, and among the folds and wrinkles of the

cloth, and even in the pockets both of my jacket and trousers. I felt in my buskins too, for these were not upon my feet, as I no longer needed them, but lying idle in a corner. I left not an inch of the place that I did not examine—and minutely too—yet still no half biscuit could be found!

I looked carefully for it, not so much on account of its value; but that its disappearance from the shelf was something rather strange—stranger still that I could nowhere lay my hand upon it.

Had I eaten it?

I began to fancy that I had done so. Perhaps, during a period of absent-mindedness, I might have swallowed it up, without ever thinking of what I was doing. Certainly, I had no remembrance of having tasted food since I ate its counterpart—the other half; and if I had eaten it also, it must have done me very little good. I had neither enjoyed the meal, nor yet did my stomach appear to have received much benefit from it, since I was just as hungry as if I had not tasted food that day.

I recollected perfectly having placed it alongside the knife and cup; and how could it part from the place, unless it had been taken away by my own hand? I could not have thrown it accidentally from the little shelf, for I did not remember making a movement in that direction. But even so, it would still have been somewhere about me? It could not get underneath the butt, for the crevice there was closed up, regularly caulked with pieces of the cloth. I had done this for the purpose of making a level surface to rest upon.

Certainly the half biscuit was not to be found. It was gone—whether down my throat or in some other way, I could not decide—but if the former, I thought to myself, what a pity I had eaten it without knowing what I was about, for certainly my absence of mind had deprived me of all enjoyment of the meal.

I wavered for a long while, as to whether I should

take another biscuit out of the box, or go to bed supperless. But the dread of the future decided me to abstain; and, summoning all my resolution, I drank off the cold water, placed my cup upon the shelf, and laid myself down for the night.

CHAPTER XXXVI

AN UGLY INTRUDER

FOR a long while I did not sleep, but lay thinking over the mysterious disappearance of the half biscuit. I say *mysterious*, for I was more than half convinced that I had *not* eaten it, but that it had gone in some other way; though how, I could not even guess, since I was perfectly alone, the only living thing, as I supposed, in that vessel's hold which could have touched it. Ah! now I thought of my dream—of the crab! Perhaps, after all, there might have been a crab?—and though it was but a dream that I was drowned, yet the rest might be true enough, and a crab might actually have crawled over me? It might have eaten the biscuit?

It would not be its natural food, I knew; but shut up in a ship's hold, where it could have no choice, it would be likely enough to eat such a thing rather than suffer starvation. There might be a crab after all?

Partly by such a train of reflections, and partly by the hungry craving of my stomach, I was kept awake for hours. At length I found myself going off, not into a regular sleep, but a half sleep or doze, from which every two or three minutes I awoke again.

In one of these intervals, during which I lay awake, I fancied that I heard a noise, different from the sounds that habitually fell upon my ear. The ship was running smoothly, and I could distinguish this unusual sound above the soft sighing of the waves.

This last was now so slight, that the ticking of my watch appeared louder and more distinct than I had ever observed it.

The sound which had attracted my attention, and which was something new to me, appeared like a gentle scratching. It came from the corner where my buskins lay empty and idle. *Something was scratching at my buskins!*

'The crab, to a certainty!' I said to myself. The thought at once drove away all ideas of sleep; and I placed myself in an attitude to listen, and, if possible, lay my hands on the thievish intruder; for I now felt certain that, crab or no crab, whatever creature was making the scratching noise was the same that had stolen my supper.

Once more I heard the scraping and scratching noise. Certainly it proceeded from my buskins?

Slowly and silently I raised myself into a half-upright position, so that I could reach the buskins with a single effort, and in this attitude I again listened for a repetition of the sound.

But though I remained patient for a considerable time, I did not hear it again; and I then passed my hands over the buskins, and around the place where they were lying, but felt nothing there. They appeared to be just as they had been left, and nothing amiss. I also groped over all the floor of my cell, but with like result. Nothing was there that ought not to have been.

I was not a little perplexed, and lay for a good while awake and listening, without hearing anything more of the mysterious noise. Sleep once more began to steal upon me, and I dropped off into a series of dozing fits as before.

Once again the scraping and scratching noise falling upon my ear disturbed me, and caused me to lie listening. Most surely it came from the buskins; but when I moved to get within reach of them, the

noise instantly ceased, as if I had frightened the creature that was making it ; and, just as before, I groped everywhere and found nothing !

‘Ha !’ muttered I to myself, ‘I now know what has been causing all this disturbance : no crab at all—for a crab could not possibly crawl so quickly out of the way. The intruder is a mouse. Nothing more nor less. Strange I did not think of this before ! I might have guessed that it was a mouse, and not have made myself so uneasy about it. It could only be a mouse ; and, but for my dream, I should, perhaps, never have thought of its being a crab’.

With this reflection I lay down again, intending to go to sleep at once, and not trouble myself any more about the mouse or its movements.

But I had scarcely settled my cheek upon the pillow, when the scratching began afresh, and it now occurred to me that the mouse was gnawing at my buskins, and probably doing them a serious damage. Although they were of no service to me just then, I could not permit them to be eaten up in this way ; and, raising myself once more, I made a dash to catch the mouse.

In this I was unsuccessful. I did not even touch the animal ; but I thought I heard it scampering through the crevice that led out between the brandy-cask and the timbers of the ship.

On handling the buskins, I discovered to my chagrin that half of the upper leather of one of them was eaten away ! The mouse must have been busy to have made so much ruin in so short a time, for it was but a few hours before that I had had the buskins in my hands, and I had then noticed nothing wrong with them. Perhaps several mice had been at work ? This was likely enough.

Partly to save the buskins from total destruction, and partly to hinder myself from being disturbed again, I took them out of the corner, and placing them near my head, covered them up with a fold of the

broadcloth. This done, I once more laid myself out for a sleep.

After awhile the dozing fit came on me, but I was again awakened by a singular sensation, as of something crawling over me ! It appeared as if some creature had just crept over my legs with great rapidity.

The feeling startled me into complete wakefulness, I did not move, however, but lay quietly waiting to see if the thing should come again.

Of course, I concluded that it was still my mouse, now running about in search of the buskins. I was getting annoyed by its intrusion, and I knew it would be no use to grope for it, as it would easily escape through one of the crevices, as soon as it found me moving. I determined, therefore, to lie quite still, and let it again crawl upon me as before, and I could then easily seize upon it. It was not my intention to kill the little creature ; but I intended to give it a good squeeze, or pinch its ear sharply, so that it would not come troubling me any more.

I lay a long while without hearing or feeling it. At last, however, my patience was likely to be rewarded. I could tell by a slight movement, in the piece of cloth that covered my limbs, that something was running upon it, and I even fancied that I heard the pattering of little feet. Nearer still the cloth appeared to move, until I could distinctly feel a creature crawling on my ankles, and then upward to my thighs. It appeared heavy for a mouse ; but I did not stay to reflect about this, for now or never was the time to seize upon it.

Down came my hands, with fingers outstretched to cover it ; but, oh, horror ! what a mistake I had made.

Instead of the little tiny mouse, which I intended to clutch, my hand rested upon the body of an animal almost as large as a kitten ! There was no mistaking what it was. *Beyond doubt, it was a great, horrid rat !*

CHAPTER XXXVII

REFLECTIONS ON RATS

THE ugly animal left me no choice to doubt of its species. The moment my fingers touched its smooth coat, I recognized it by the 'feel'; but I felt the wicked creature in a double sense, for before I could disengage my hand from the clutch I had so rashly taken, its sharp teeth had pierced my thumb, until they nearly met through the flesh. At the same instant its screech sounded in my ears shrill and terrifying!

I withdrew my fingers as quickly as I could, and flinging myself to the furthest corner of the chamber—that is, the one which I thought furthest from my disagreeable visitor—there for some minutes I crouched, listening to hear whether the hideous animal had left me.

I could hear nothing, and I concluded it had made a retreat to some other part of the ship. Most probably it was as badly scared as I—though that could hardly have been—and in proof that I was the more frightened of the two, the rat had the presence of mind to use its teeth and bite me, while I was for the moment quite driven out of my senses.

In the brief encounter my antagonist had certainly proved victorious; for in addition to the fright he had given me, he had inflicted a severe and painful wound, that was every moment growing more painful. I perceived that my thumb was bleeding freely, for I could feel the blood running over my fingers, and glueing them to the very tips.

I could have borne my discomfiture calmly enough, for what signified the bite of a rat? but that was not the whole question. The thought that troubled me was, whether the creature had quite gone away, or whether it was still near, and would return?

The thought of its coming back again, perhaps emboldened by having got off without punishment, caused me very great annoyance.

You may wonder at this, but it was really the case. During all my life I have had a sort of instinctive antipathy to rats—I might even say a *dread* of them. This feeling was stronger while I was only a boy; but, although I have since encountered animals of a much more dangerous character, and fought with some, I do not remember any that ever inspired me with more fear than I have felt in coming in contact with that common and ubiquitous creature—the *rat*. It is a fear blended with a feeling of disgust; and it is a fear not altogether unfounded—for I know of many well-authenticated cases, in which rats have attacked human beings, and not a few where children, and even men, wounded or otherwise disabled, have actually been killed and devoured by these hideous *omnivora*.

Many such stories had been told me while I was a boy; and it was but natural I should remember them at that moment. I *did* remember them; and under the influence of such memories, I felt a fear upon me very much akin to terror. The rat, too, was one of the largest I had ever encountered, so large that for a moment I could scarce believe it to be a rat. It *felt* as bulky as a half-grown cat.

As soon as I became a little composed, I tied up my thumb with a rag torn from my shirt. The wound in a few minutes' time had grown exceedingly painful—for the tooth of a rat is almost as poisonous as the bite of a scorpion—and small as was the scratch, I anticipated a good deal of suffering from it.

I need not add that the incident had banished sleep, at least for a time. In reality I did not go to sleep again till nearly morning ; and then I awoke every minute or two with a start—from fearful dreams, in which the vision was either a rat or a crab making to seize me by the throat !

For hours before I slept at all, I lay listening to see if the brute would return ; but I did not note any signs of his presence for the remainder of that night. Perhaps the *squeeze* I had given him—for I had come down rather heavily upon him—had frightened him enough to hinder a repetition of his visit. With this hope I consoled myself, else it might have been still longer before I should have slept.

Of course, the presence of the rat at once accounted for the disappearance of my half biscuit, as well as for the damaged upper leather of my buskin, which latter had been lying at the door of his milder cousin the mouse. The rat, then, must have been prowling around me all the while, without my having known of it.

During the hours I lay listening, before falling asleep again, my mind was busy with one particular thought—that was, how I should manage in case the rat should return ? How was I to destroy—or, at all events, get rid of—this most unwelcome intruder ? I would at that moment have given a year of my life for the loan of a steel trap, or any trap that would take rats ; but since the loan of a trap was out of the question, I set my brains to work to invent some contrivance that would enable me to rid myself of my unpleasant neighbour : neighbour I might call him, for I knew that his house was not far off—perhaps at that moment he had his den not three feet from my face—likely enough, under the biscuit-box or the cask of brandy.

Cudgel my brains as I might I could hit upon no plan to get hold of him—at least, no plan to trap

him with safety. I felt pretty sure I could lay my hands upon him, provided he came near enough, just as I had done already ; but I was in no humour to repeat that performance. I knew the crevice by which he had retreated. It was the aperture between the two great barrels—the brandy-cask and the water-butt.

I fancied he would return the same way, if he came back at all ; and it occurred to me that if I were to stop up all the other apertures except that one—which I could easily do with pieces of cloth—let him come in, and then suddenly cut off his retreat by caulking that one also, I should have him in the trap. But this would be placing myself in an awkward situation. I should be in the trap as well as he, and he no nearer destruction than ever, unless I finished him by a hand-to-hand tussle. Of course, I knew I could conquer and kill the rat. My superior strength would enable me to squeeze him to death between my hands, but not without getting a good many severe bites, and the one I had got already hindered me from having any relish for another encounter of the kind.

How, then, was I to manage without a trap ? That was the thought that occupied me as I lay sleepless and in dread of the rat returning.

But I cogitated to no purpose. It was well-nigh morning, when, worn with watching and planning, I fell off into the half-dozing half-dreaming state—of which I have already spoken—and still no feasible plan had offered itself for entrapping the ‘vermin’ that was causing me so much annoyance and alarm.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

OH ! FOR A STEEL TRAP !

AFTER several hours spent in dozing and dreaming by 'fits and starts', I was again fairly awake, and could sleep no more for thinking of the great rat. Indeed, the pain I suffered was of itself sufficient to keep me awake ; for not only my thumb, but the whole hand was swollen, and ached acutely. I had no remedy but to bear it patiently ; and knowing that the inflammation would soon subside and relieve me, I made up my mind to endure it with fortitude. Greater evils absorb the less ; and it was so in my case. My dread of the rat paying me another visit was a far greater trouble to me than the pain of my wound, and as my attention was wholly taken up with the former, I almost forgot that my thumb was aching.

As soon as I was well awake, my thoughts returned to the subject of trapping my tormentor. I was quite sure he would return to trouble me, for I already had some indications of his presence. The weather still continued calm, and I could hear any occasional sounds very distinctly. I heard what resembled the pattering of little feet, as of the rat running over the lid of an empty box ; and once or twice I clearly distinguished the short, shrill cricket-like 'chirp' that rats are wont to utter. I can think of no more disagreeable sound than the voice of a rat, and at that time it sounded doubly disagreeable. You may smile at my simple fears, but I could not help them.

I could not help a presentiment that somehow or other my life was in danger from the presence of this rat, and the presentiment was not a vain or idle one, as you shall afterwards learn.

The fear that I had, then, was that the rat would attack me in my sleep. So long as I might be awake, I was not much afraid that it could do me any very great injury. It might bite me, as it had done already, but that signified little. I should be able to destroy it somehow. But supposing I should fall into a deep sleep, and the spiteful creature should then seize me by the throat ? Some such idea as this it was that kept me in misery. I could not always keep awake and on the *qui vive*. The longer I did so, the more deeply would I slumber afterwards, and then would be the time of danger. I could not go to sleep again with any feeling of security until that rat was destroyed ; and therefore its destruction was the end I now aimed at.

I remained cogitating as to how I should encompass it ; but for the life of me I could think of no other way than to gripe the creature in my hands, and squeeze it to death. If I could have made sure of getting a proper hold of it—that is, with my fingers round its throat, so that it could not turn its teeth upon me—then the thing would be easy enough. But therein lay the difficulty. I should have to seize it in the dark—at random—and likely enough it would prove as quick as myself in getting the advantage of the hold. Moreover, my crippled thumb was in such a condition, that in that hand—my right one, too—I was not sure I could even hold the rat, much less crush the life out of it.

I bethought me of some means of protecting my fingers from its teeth. If I had only been possessed of a pair of strong gloves ; but then I was not, and it was no use thinking of them.

Yes, it was of use : it proved so ; for thinking of

the gloves suggested the idea of a substitute ; and this substitute *was* within my reach—*my buskins*. By inserting my hands into these, and covering them up to the wrists, I should gain a protection against the sharp teeth of the rat, and could I only get the animal under the soles, I would surely have strength enough to squeeze the breath out of it. A capital idea, and I at once proceeded to carry it into execution.

Placing the buskins in readiness, I crouched near the crevice where the rat should enter. All the others, as already stated, I had carefully plugged up, and I now determined, if the rat came in, to stuff my jacket into the aperture before it could retreat, and thus have it at my mercy. I should then speedily put on my gloves, and pound away till I had finished the business.

It seemed as if the rat had either determined to brave the encounter, or that fortune was against it.

I had scarcely set my house in order to receive my visitor, when the pattering of feet upon the broadcloth, and a little squeak which I heard, told me that the rat had passed through the crevice, and was actually inside the enclosure. I plainly heard it rushing about, as I pushed the jacket into the aperture ; and once or twice I felt it coursing across my legs ; but I took no heed of its movements until I had made all secure against its retreat. Then I planted my hands firmly in the buskins, and commenced searching for the enemy.

As I was intimately acquainted with the shape of my little chamber, and knew to the breadth of a hair where every corner lay, I was not long in 'feeling' it up. My mode of proceeding was to raise the buskins, and plant them down again, each time striking upon new ground. I believed that if I could only get one of them upon a portion of the rat's body, I could hold it, until I might secure a safer hold with both, and then it would only remain to press down-

ward with all my might. This was my programme, but though well enough designed, I was unable to carry it through.

The affair ended in a very different way. I succeeded in planting one of the buskins upon the animal, but from the want of a firm floor underneath, I was not able to hold it, and the soft cloth yielding enabled it to get away. It escaped from my hold with a loud screech, and the next place I felt it was running up the leg of my trousers and inside !

A feeling of horror ran through my veins ; but I was now warmed to the encounter ; and, throwing aside the buskins, which were no longer of service, I grasped the body of the rat, just as it had reached the height of my knee. I was able to hold it there, although it struggled with a strength that quite astonished me, and its loud squealing was terrible to hear.

I still held on, pressing the body with all my might, and quite insensible to the pain in my thumb. The cloth of my trousers protected my fingers from being bitten, but I did not come off unscathed, for the spiteful creature buried its teeth in my flesh, and kept them there as long as it was able to move. It was only after I had got my thumb round its throat, and fairly *choked it to death*, that the teeth relaxed their grasp, and I perceived that I had succeeded in putting a period to its existence.

Having released the body from my hold, I shook it out of my trousers quite lifeless and limp ; and then, removing my jacket from the aperture, I flung the dead rat out in the direction whence it had come.

I felt greatly relieved ; and, confident that I should no longer be troubled by Monsieur Rat, I betook myself to sleep, determined to make up for what I had lost during the night.

CHAPTER XXXIX

A SWARM OF INTRUDERS

My feeling of security proved to be a false one. I could not have been asleep more than a quarter of an hour, when I was suddenly awakened by something running over my breast. Was it another rat? If not, it certainly was some creature that behaved exactly like one.

I lay for some moments without stirring, and listened attentively; but I could hear nothing. Had I only dreamt that something ran over me? Not so; for just then I thought I could hear the pattering of little feet over the loose cloth. Right; I did hear the sound, and the moment after felt the same feet upon my thigh.

Starting upward, and bringing my hand down upon the spot, I was again horrified by feeling a large rat, that, as soon as I touched it, sprang away, and I could hear it rattling off through the crevice between the casks.

Surely it could not be the same I had just despatched? No, cats *do* come to life again after being supposed to be dead (sometimes after being buried!) but I never heard of rats possessing this extraordinary power of vitality. I felt satisfied that I had quite killed the rat—in fact, the handling I gave it might have taken nine lives, if it had had that number to spare. It was dead as a nail when I flung it out. It could not be that one.

And yet, absurd as it may seem, I fancied, half

asleep as I was, that it was the same rat returning to avenge itself. This fancy, however, forsook me as soon as I was fairly awake, and I knew it could not be the same. Most likely it was its mate, or partner, and a fit partner it was, for I noticed as I passed my fingers over it, that this second one was also a rat of very large size.

No doubt, thought I, this is the female of the one I have killed coming in search of her mate. But she had entered by the same crevice; she must have passed where the dead one lay, and must know what had occurred? Was she going to avenge his death?

Sleep was again banished from my eyes. How could I sleep, with such a hideous animal prowling about, and perhaps with the fixed intention to attack me?

Wearied as I had now grown with watching, I could not go to rest until I should rid myself of this second intruder.

I was under the belief that this one would soon return again. I had not caught hold of it, but merely touched it with my fingers, and as I had offered no particular violence to it, likely enough it would soon venture back.

Under this conviction I placed myself as before, close to the crevice, jacket in hand, and with my ear set close to the aperture, I listened attentively.

In a few minutes I distinctly heard the chirrup of a rat outside, and almost continually the same scratching and pattering I had noticed before.

I think there was some loose board or hollow box by which the sound was produced—for it was very loud to be caused by so small an animal. These noises continued, and I fancied that I also heard the rat passing into my chamber, but still the pattering and scratching were kept up outside, and therefore the animal could not be in.

Once more I was sure I heard it passing me, but at the same time the chirrup fell on my ear, and that certainly came from without. Again and again I fancied I was not the only tenant of the chamber, but I still restrained myself from closing up the crevice, thinking I might be mistaken.

At length, however, a loud squeal was uttered to the right of my position, certainly within the enclosure ; and, waiting no longer, I stuffed the jacket into the aperture, and made all tight and sure.

I now turned to feel for the rat, taking the precaution, as before, to insert my hands into the buskins. I had taken still another precaution, and that was to tie the legs of my trousers tight around my ankles, lest this other rat should act as its predecessor had done. Thus prepared, I proceeded to grope around.

I had no liking for the encounter, but I was determined to rid myself of the annoyance which I had been suffering, and get some sleep, without being again disturbed ; and I could think of no other way than to kill the rat as I had done its companion.

So to work I again went. Horror of horrors ! fancy the terrible fears that ran through me, when, instead of one rat, I discovered that a whole swarm of these hideous brutes was enclosed in my apartment ! Not one, but probably half a score of them ! The place appeared crowded with them, and I could scarce put down the buskins without touching one. I felt them running all around me, over my legs, the backs of my hands—everywhere—at the same time uttering their fierce cries as if they were menacing me !

It is but truth to say, I was frightened nearly out of my senses. I thought no longer about killing them. For some moments I scarcely knew what I was doing ; but I remember that I had the presence of mind to lay hold of my jacket, and pull it out of the aperture. Then swinging it around, I continued to

beat the floor in every direction, shouting all the while at the top of my voice.

My shouts and the violence of my actions appeared to produce the desired effect, for I heard the rats retreating through the crevice ; and after a time, on venturing to reconnoitre the floor with my naked hands, I found, to my delight, they had taken their departure, one and all of them.

CHAPTER XL

THE NORWAY RAT

IF I was uncomfortable before with the presence of a single rat, how much more uneasy was I with the knowledge that a whole gang of these disgusting animals was in my neighbourhood ! There must be a still greater number than those I had just routed ; for before closing up the aperture with my jacket, I had still heard others squeaking and scraping on the boards outside. Like enough there were scores of them ; for I had heard that in many ships such vermin abound, finding a secure hiding-place in the numerous crevices among the timbers of the hold. I had heard, moreover, that these ship-rats are the fiercest of their kind, and when driven to extremes by hunger—which is not unfrequently the case—will not hesitate to attack living creatures, and show but little fear of either cat or dog. They often commit extensive damage upon articles of the cargo, and are thus a great nuisance in a ship, especially when she has not been properly overhauled and cleaned out before loading for a voyage. These ship-rats are the sort known as ‘ Norway rats ’, on account of a belief that they were first brought to England in Norwegian ships ; but whether they originated in Norway or elsewhere, it matters little, as they are now universally distributed over the whole globe, and I believe there is no part of the earth, where ships have touched, that Norway rats are not found in abundance. If Norway was in reality the country of their origin, then it follows that

all climes are alike to them, since they are especially abundant and thriving in the hot tropical climates of America. Seaport towns in the West Indies and the continents of both North and South America are infested with them ; and so great a nuisance are they deemed in some of these places, that a 'rat-bounty' is usually offered by the municipal authorities for their destruction. Notwithstanding this premium for killing them, they still exist in countless numbers, and the wooden wharves of these American seaports appear to be their true *harbours of refuge* !

The Norway rats are not individually large rats. Occasionally very large ones are found among them, but these are exceptional cases. They are in general less distinguished for size, than for a fierce and spiteful disposition, combined with a great fecundity, which of course renders them exceedingly numerous and troublesome. It has been observed that wherever they make their appearance, in a few years the rats of all other species disappear ; and it is therefore conjectured that the Norway rats destroy the other kinds ! Weazels are no match for them—for what they lack in individual strength is amply compensated for by their numbers—and in these hot countries they outnumber their enemies in the proportion of hundreds to one. Even cats are afraid of them ; and in many parts of the world the cats will shy away from an encounter with Norway rats, choosing for their prey some victim of a milder disposition. Even large dogs, unless specially set on, will prefer to pass and give them a wide berth.

One fact about the Norway rat is peculiar : it appears to know when it possesses the advantage. Where they are but few and in danger of being destroyed, they are timid enough ; but in those countries where they are allowed to increase, they become emboldened by impunity, and are much less awed by the presence of man. In the seaports of some tropical

countries they will scarce take the precaution to hide themselves ; and on moonlight nights, when they come out in great numbers, they hardly deign to turn aside out of the way of the passenger. They will just creep a little to one side, and then close up behind the heels of any one who may be passing along. Such creatures are the Norway rats.

I was not acquainted with all these facts at the time of my adventure with the rats in the ship *Inca* ; but I knew enough, even then, from sailors' yarns I had heard, to make me very uncomfortable at the presence of so many of these ugly animals ; and, after I had succeeded in driving them out of my little chamber, I was far from being easy in my mind. I felt almost certain they would return again, and perhaps in greater force than ever. Perhaps they would become hungered during the voyage, and consequently bolder and fiercer—bold enough to attack me. Even then, I thought that they had appeared by no means afraid of me. Though with my shouts and violent efforts I had forced them out, I could still hear them near at hand, scampering about and squeaking to one another. What if they were already half famished and meditating an attack upon me ! From facts that I had heard of, the thing was not very improbable ; and I need hardly say that the very suspicion of such a probability made a most painful impression upon me. The thought of being killed and devoured by these horrid creatures, caused within me a feeling of dread far greater than I had felt when I was anticipating death by being drowned. I should have preferred drowning to a death like that ; and when for a moment I dwelt upon the probability of such a fate, the blood ran coldly through my veins, and the hair seemed to stiffen upon my scalp.

For some minutes I sat, or rather knelt (for I was upon my knees while striking around me with the jacket), not knowing what course to follow. I still

believed that the rats would not have the boldness to approach me, so long as I remained awake and could defend myself. But how would it be were I to go to sleep again? Then, indeed, they might be encouraged to attack me, and once they had got their teeth into my flesh, they might resemble the tiger, who, having tasted blood, is not satisfied till he has destroyed his victim. I dared not go to sleep.

And yet I could not always keep awake. Sleep would in time overpower me, and I should have to yield to it in the end. The longer I struggled against it, the deeper the sleep that would follow; and perhaps I might fall into some profound slumber from which I might never awake—some terrible ‘nightmare’ that would bind me beyond the power of moving, and thus render me an easy prey to the voracious monsters that surrounded me!

For a short while I suffered these painful apprehensions, but soon an idea came into my mind that gave me relief; and that was, to replace my jacket in the crevice through which the rats had entered, and thus shut them out altogether.

It was certainly a very simple way of getting over the difficulty; and, no doubt, it would have occurred to me sooner—that is, when the first and second rats had been troubling me—but then I thought there were but the two, and I might settle with them in a different way. Now, however, the case was different. To destroy all the rats that were in the hold of that ship would be a serious undertaking, if not an impossibility, and I no longer thought of such a thing. The best plan, therefore, would be that which I had now hit upon: to stop up the main aperture, and also every other through which a rat could possibly squeeze his body, and thus be at once secured against either their intrusion or their attacks.

Without further delay, I ‘plugged’ up the crevice with my jacket; and, wondering that I had not

thought of this simple plan before, I laid me down—this time with a full confidence that I might sleep undisturbed, as long as I should feel the necessity or inclination.

CHAPTER XLI

DREAM AND REALITY

So wearied had I become with fears and long waking, that my cheek had scarce touched my pillow, before I was off into the land of dreams. And not the *land* of dreams either, for it was the *sea* of which I dreamt ; and, just as before, that I was at its bottom, and surrounded by horrid crab-like monsters who threatened to eat me up.

Now and then, however, these crab-like creatures assumed the form of rats ; and then my dream more resembled reality. I dreamt that they were in vast numbers around me, and menaced me from every side ; that I had only my jacket to keep them off, and that I was sweeping it from side to side for that purpose. I thought they grew bolder and bolder as they saw how little damage I was able to do them with such a weapon ; and that a very large rat, much bigger than any of the others, was encouraging them on to the attack. This was not a real rat, but the ghost of one—of that one I had killed ! He was leading the swarm of my assailants, and counselling them to avenge his murder ! Such was the fancy of my dream.

I thought that, for a long time, I was successful in keeping them at bay ; but my strength was fast failing me, and unless succour arrived, I would be overpowered. I looked around and called loudly for help, but no one appeared to be near me.

My assailants at length perceived that my strength was gone ; and, at a signal given by their ghost leader,

made a simultaneous rush upon me. They came from the front, from behind, from both sides, and although I struck around me in a last despairing effort, it was to no purpose. Dozens of them I had flung backward, tumbling upon their backs and over one another, but their places were instantly filled up again by others that came from behind.

I could struggle no longer. Resistance was idle. I felt them crawling up my legs, my thighs, my back. They clung to me all over, their bodies covering mine like a swarm of bees upon a branch ; and before they had time to inflict a wound upon my flesh, their very weight caused me to stagger, and fall heavily to the earth !

The fall appeared to save me ; for as soon as I touched ground, the rats let go their hold and ran scampering off, as if frightened at the effect they had produced !

I was pleasantly surprised at this *dénouement*, and for some moments was unable to explain it ; but my senses soon became clearer ; and I was rejoiced to find that the horror I had been experiencing was only the illusion of a dream ; and the fall which I had suffered, was the breaking up of the vision that had awakened me !

In the next instant, however, I changed my mind ; and my new-sprung joy departed as suddenly as it had arisen. It was not all a dream. *Rats had been upon me, and rats were at that moment in my chamber !* I heard them scampering about. I heard their ugly screeches ; and before I could raise myself, one of them ran over my face !

This was a new source of terror. How had they got in ? The very mystery of their being inside was of itself enough to give me a shock. How had they got there ? Had they pushed out the jacket ? Mechanically, I felt for it. No. It was there in its place, just as I had left it ! I drew it out for the purpose of striking around me, to drive the vermin off. I

struck with it and shouted as I had done before, and succeeded in clearing them off ; but I was now in greater terror than ever, for I could not explain how they were able thus to reach me, notwithstanding all my precautions.

For a time, I was sorely perplexed, but I found the explanation at length. It was not through the crevice, I had stopped with the jacket, they had sought entrance ; but by another aperture, which I had caulked with a piece of cloth. The cloth was too small—it had been loose, and the rats had actually torn it out with their teeth !

This accounted for their gaining an entrance ; but, at the same time, it by no means removed my alarm. On the contrary, it furnished me cause for increased anxiety. Why were those creatures thus pertinacious, returning again and again ? What wanted they in my hiding-place, more than in any other part of the ship ? What could they want, but *to kill and eat me* ?

Verily, I could think of no other reason why I was thus assailed.

The fear of such a consequence now aroused all my energies. I had not been asleep more than an hour, as I knew by my watch ; but I could not go to sleep again, until I had fully secured myself ; and for this purpose, I set about putting my fortress in a more proper state of defence. I removed the former stuffings from the apertures, one by one, and replaced them more firmly. I even went through the labour of taking all the biscuits out of the box, and drawing forth two or three fresh pieces of cloth to help me in my ‘caulking’. I then restored the biscuits to their places, and closed up every aperture that existed. I had the greatest difficulty upon that side where the box stood, for around it there were many ill-shaped crevices ; but I got over the difficulty, by means of a large web of cloth, which, when placed upon its end, exactly fitted the open space—through which I had squeezed

my own carcass on that occasion, when I was so unfortunate as to set my foot aboard the ship. On this side, the piece of cloth left no more caulking to be done, as it fitted just tight enough to prevent any living creature from passing beside it. The only disadvantage it offered was, that it hindered me from getting conveniently at my store of biscuits, for it covered the opening in the box ; but I thought of this before pushing it into its place, and carried a supply of the biscuits inside—enough to last me for a week or two. When these should be eaten, I could remove the web ; and, before any rats could come in to trouble me, provide myself for another week.

It occupied me full two hours, in completing all these arrangements, for I worked with great care to make my fortress walls secure. It was no play I was performing. It was a matter that possessed the serious interest of my life's safety.

When I had made all tight to my perfect satisfaction, I lay down to sleep again—this time *quite certain* that I should get something more than a mere 'cat-nap.'

CHAPTER XLII

A SOUND SLEEP AT LAST

I WAS not disappointed. I slept for a period of twelve hours' duration—not without many fearful dreams—terrible encounters with crabs and rats. So far as the comfort of the thing was concerned, I might almost as well have been awake, and actually engaged in such conflicts. My sleep was far from refreshing, notwithstanding its long continuance ; but it was pleasant on awaking to find that my unwelcome visitors had not been back again, and that no breach had been made in my defences. I groped all around, and found that everything was just as I had left it.

For several days, I felt comparatively at my ease. I had no longer any apprehension of danger from the rats, though I knew they were still close to me. When the weather was calm (and it continued so for a long while), I could hear the animals outside, busy at whatever they had to do, rattling about among the packages of merchandise, and occasionally uttering spiteful shrieks, as if they were engaged in combats with each other. But their voices no longer terrified me, as I was pretty sure they could not get nearer me. Whenever, for any purpose, I removed one of the cloth pieces with which my little cabin was 'chinked', I took good care to return it to its place again, before any of the animals could know that the aperture was open.

I experienced a good deal of discomfort from being thus shut up. The weather was exceedingly warm ; and as not a breath of air could reach me, or circulate

through the apartment, it felt at times as hot as the inside of a baker's oven. Very likely we were sailing under the line, or, at all events, in some part of the tropical latitudes; and this would account for the calmness of the atmosphere, since, in these latitudes, stormy weather is much more rare than in either of the so-called temperate zones. Once, indeed, during this time, we experienced a very sharp gale, which lasted for a day and night. It was succeeded as usual by a heavy swell, during which the ship tumbled about, as if she would turn bottom upwards.

I was not sea-sick on this occasion; but, as I had nothing to hold on by, I was sadly rolled about in my little cabin, now pitching head foremost against the butt, now falling backward upon the side of the ship, till every bone in my body was as sore as if I had been cudgelled! The rocking of the vessel, too, occasionally caused the boxes and barrels to move a little; and this had the effect of loosening the cloth caulking, and causing it to drop out. Still apprehensive of an inroad from the rats, I was kept busy, all the time the gale lasted, in plugging the crevices afresh.

Upon the whole, I think that this employment was pleasanter than doing nothing. It rather helped me to pass the time; and the two days during which the gale and swell kept me so occupied, seemed shorter than any other two. By far the bitterest hours were those in which I could find nothing at all to do—absolutely nothing to engage my thoughts. Then I would remain for long hours together—sometimes without making a motion, or changing the attitude in which I lay—sometimes without even having a thought; and thus dark, and lonely, and longing, I feared that my reason would forsake me, and that I should go mad!

In this way, two more weeks had passed over, as I knew by the notches on my stick. Otherwise they might have been months—ay, years—so long did the time appear. With the exception of the hours in

which we experienced the gale, all the rest was complete monotony ; and not one fact or occurrence transpired to make an impression on my memory.

During all this time, I had strictly adhered to my regulations regarding food and drink. Notwithstanding that I often hungered, and could have eaten up a week's allowance at a single meal, I had not exceeded the prescribed ration. Many a time it cost me an effort to deny myself ; and often the half biscuit, which was to serve for another meal, was put aside with most tardy reluctance, and seemed to cling to my fingers, as I placed it on the little shelf. But I congratulated myself that up to this time—with the exception of that day upon which I had eaten the four biscuits at a meal—I had been able to keep my resolve, and contend bravely against the craving appetite of hunger.

Thirsty I never was. I had no uneasiness on this score. My ration of water was quite enough for me, and more than enough. On most days I used far short of the allowance, and could drink as much as I wanted.

The supply of biscuits I had brought inside, when shutting myself up against the rats, was at length exhausted. I was glad of this. It proved that time was passing away—two weeks must have elapsed, as I had counted the biscuits at the commencement of this period, and found that they were just the allowance for so long. The time, then, had come round for me to go back to my larder, and procure a fresh supply.

As I proceeded to do so, a singular apprehension arose in my mind. It came suddenly, as if an arrow had been shot into my heart. It was the presentiment, of a great misfortune ; or not exactly a presentiment, but a fear caused by something I had noticed only the minute before. I had heard a noise outside, which as usual I attributed to my neighbours the rats. Often, indeed almost continually, similar noises had proceeded

from without, but none that impressed me like this, for it appeared to reach me from a new direction—the direction of the biscuit-box.

My fingers trembled as I removed the web ; and still more as I thrust my hands into the box. Merciful heavens ! *the box was empty !*

No, not empty. As I plunged my hand deeper, it rested upon something soft and smooth—a rat. The animal sprang suddenly aside as it felt my touch, and I drew back my hand with a like rapid movement. Mechanically I felt in another place, only to touch another rat, and then another, and another ! The box appeared half full of them, side by side, as close as they could sit. They leaped about and scattered off in different directions, some even jumping against my breast, as they shot out by the aperture, and others striking the sides of the box, and uttering loud cries.

I succeeded in routing them. But, alas ! when they were gone, and I proceeded to examine my store, I found, to my chagrin, that nearly the whole of my biscuits were gone too ! All of them that were left were broken to pieces, and nothing remained in the box, but a pile of crumbs covering the bottom, upon which the rats had been feeding at the moment I surprised them.

This was an evil of the grandest magnitude ; and I was so overwhelmed upon the discovery of it, that for a time I scarce knew what I was doing.

The consequences were plain enough. My provisions were gone—starvation stared me in the face. Nay, starvation was no longer a matter of doubt. It was now certain. The mumbled crumbs which the hideous robbers had left (and which they would also have eaten up in another hour, had I not surprised them) would not keep the life in me for a week ; and what then ? ay, what then ! Starvation—death by hunger !

There was no alternative. So reasoned I, and how could it be otherwise?

For awhile, I felt reckless and despairing—almost reckless enough to refrain from taking any steps to hinder the rats from returning to the box. It was my belief, that I must in the end succumb to this misfortune—*must starve*—and it was no use procrastinating my fate. I might as well die at once, as at the end of the week. To live for days, knowing that death was certain, would be a terrible state of endurance—worse than death itself; and here again returned to me those dark suicidal thoughts, that had once before passed through my mind.

They troubled me only for a moment. The remembrance that I had had them before, and that then I had been delivered from them—as it were miraculously—that although I could not see how it was to be found, there might still be a way of escape—the hand of Providence, as it had done already, might still be held over me, and point out that way—these reflections and remembrances came back into my mind, and once more a ray of hope shone upon my future. True, there was no definite hope, but just enough to arouse me to fresh energy, and save me from absolute despair. The presence of the rats, too, had an effect in quickening my actions. I perceived that they were still close at hand, threatening to re-enter the box and finish their work of demolition. In truth, I could now only keep them out by making the most violent demonstrations.

I found that the place where they had got in was not the aperture which I myself used. That was closed up with the web, and they could not pass through there. They had entered on the opposite side, from the box of cloth, into which they had been able to make their way, since I had myself removed one of the boards out of its side. It had all been done recently; or, more likely, to cut through the thick plank had employed them for some time, and so delayed the execution of

their design. But for this, they might have reached the inside sooner, and then not a morsel would have been left. No doubt it was for the purpose of getting at the biscuits that they had swarmed once or twice into my chamber—for that gave them free access to the box.

I now deeply regretted my negligence in not securing my store in a safe way. I had already thought of doing so, but I never imagined these creatures could make an entry from behind, and I knew that the web of cloth completely shut them out on the inside.

Alas ! it was now too late ; regrets were idle ; and, following out that instinct which prompts us to preserve life as long as we can, I transferred the fragments from the box to my little shelf inside ; and then, making all tight as before, I lay down to reflect upon my situation, rendered gloomier than ever by this unexpected misfortune.

CHAPTER XLIII

SEARCH AFTER ANOTHER BISCUIT-BOX

FOR many hours I remained brooding over the altered state of my affairs, with no thought arising to cheer me. I felt so hopeless that I did not even take stock of the biscuits, or rather the crumbs that were left. I guessed roughly by the size of the little heap that it might sustain life—keeping up the very small ration I had been hitherto using—for about ten days—not more. Ten days, then, or at most a fortnight, had I to live, with the prospect of certain death at the end of that time—and a death that experience told me must be slow and painful. I had already suffered the extreme of hunger, almost to death, and I dreaded to try it again ; but there appeared no hope of escaping from such a doom—at least, none appeared at the moment.

The shock that followed the discovery of my loss rendered me for a long time unable to think clearly. My mind was dejected and pusillanimous—my brain, as it were, paralysed—so that whenever I took to thinking, my thoughts only wandered, or centred on the terrible doom that waited me.

In time a reaction arrived, and I was better able to reflect on the circumstances in which I was now placed. Gradually hope dawned again, though it was only, of an indistinct and very indefinite character—literally but a ‘ray’. The thought that occurred to me was simply this : that as I had found one box of biscuits, why might there not be a second ? If not immediately beside the first, it might be near. As

stated already, I believed that in the stowage of a ship, goods of the same kind are not always placed together, but miscellaneous—just as the different packages may fit to the shape of the hold and to each other. I had proof that this was the usual arrangement, since around me, and in juxtaposition, were articles of very different kinds—biscuits, broadcloth, brandy, and the butt of water. Although there was no second box of biscuits immediately adjoining the one already emptied, there might be another *not far off*—perhaps just on the other side of the cloth-box, or in some place where I might be able to *get at it*.

This, then, was the thought that inspired me with new hope.

As soon as I had conceived it, all my energies returned, and I set about reflecting on what course I should take to ascertain whether there was another biscuit-box that it was possible for me to reach.

The plan of reaching it was already shaped out in my mind. In fact, there was but one way—with my knife. No other means were within my reach, and therefore I thought of none. To cut a way with my knife through such packages—boxes, bales, or barrels—as might lie between my chamber and the desired biscuits, was the idea that had entered my mind, and it seemed more feasible and practicable the longer I reflected upon it. Deeds that would appear difficult, if not impossible, under ordinary circumstances, present a different aspect to one whose life is in danger, and who knows it may be saved by accomplishing them. The direst hardships, and severest privations, become light trials when life and death are on the issue.

It was from this point of view that I was compelled to contemplate the feat I now intended to perform; and I thought but lightly of the time and trouble, so long as there was a prospect of their saving me from horrid death by starvation.

I resolved, therefore, to hew a way with my knife among the packages of merchandise, in hopes of coming to one that contained food. If successful, then I should live; if not, I must die. Another thought had some effect in encouraging me to the attempt. It would be better for me to pass my time still hoping, than to yield to despair and remain idle. To live for two weeks in the certain anticipation of death, would have been a thousand times more painful than death itself.

Far better to struggle on, nourishing hope with the exertions I should be making for my safety. The very labour itself would help me to pass the time, and hinder me from brooding too keenly on my doubtful fate.

Thus ran my reflections, as I became once more roused to the energy that for awhile had forsaken me.

I was on my knees, knife in hand, resolved and ready. That precious piece of steel, how prized at the moment! I would not have exchanged it for the full of the ship of red gold!

I have said that I was upon my knees. I could not have stood erect, had I wished it. There was not room. The ceiling of my cabin was too low.

Was it my peculiar attitude that suggested the thought? Perhaps it had some influence. I cannot now remember; but I well remember that before proceeding farther in my design, I offered up a prayer—humble and earnest—to God, who had already, as I firmly believed, stretched forth his hand to succour me. I prayed for guidance, for strength, for success. I need not add that my prayer was heard, else I should not now have been living to record it.

My intention was first to work through the cloth-box, and discover what was behind it. That which had contained the biscuits was now empty, and I could get through it without trouble. It will be remembered that I had already been inside the biscuit-box while searching for another, and also while procuring the

pieces of cloth ; and so far my way was clear. But to get across the one in which the broadcloth was packed, it would be necessary to pull out several more pieces, to give me room to work on to the next. My knife, therefore, would not be needed at first starting ; and putting it aside, where I could easily lay my hands upon it again, I ducked my head and crawled into the empty box. In another minute I was pulling and tugging away at the stiff rolls of broadcloth—all my strength being exerted, and all my energies employed in detaching them from their places.

CHAPTER XLIV

THE CRUMBS SECURED

THIS was a work that cost me both time and labour much more than you might imagine. No doubt the cloth had been packed with the idea of economizing space, and the pieces were wedged as tightly together as if done by a steam-press. Those opposite the opening I had made, came out easily enough ; but with the others I had more trouble. It took all my strength to detach many of them from their places. When a few were removed, the work became easier. There were several rolls larger than the rest. They were larger, because they were of coarser cloth. They were too big to pass through the apertures I had made, either the one in the cloth-case, or that in the side of the biscuit-box. I was puzzled how to deal with them. I could not enlarge the openings without a great deal of labour. On account of the situation of the two boxes, it was not possible to knock off another board. I should have to cut the hole wider with my knife ; and this, for the same reason, would have been difficult.

A better plan suggested itself—apparently a better, but which in the end proved a mistake. I managed the matter by cutting off the fastenings of each piece, and, laying hold of the end of the web, unrolled it. I then drew out the loose cloth until the web became small enough to pass through. In this way I succeeded in emptying the case, but the work kept me employed for several hours.

I was delayed, moreover, by a more serious interrup-

tion. On returning to my chamber, with the first piece of cloth which I had drawn out of the box, I found, to my consternation, that it was already occupied by other tenants—a score of them : the rats were in possession !

I dropped the piece of cloth ; and, dashing into their midst, succeeded in routing them ; but, as I had anticipated from their presence, I found that another portion of my wretched store of provisions was eaten or carried off. Not a great deal, however, appeared to have been taken. Fortunately, I had been absent only for a short while. Had I been gone for but another twenty minutes, the robbers would have quite cleared me out, and left me not a crumb to live upon.

The consequence of this would have been fatal ; and once more deploring my negligence, I resolved to take better care for the future. I spread out a large piece of the cloth, and depositing the fragments upon it, I wrapped them up into a sort of bag-like bundle, which I tied as firmly as I could with a strip of list torn from the cloth itself. This, I fancied, would keep all safe ; and placing it in a corner, I proceeded with my work.

As I passed to and fro upon my hands and knees—now empty-handed, now dragging with me a piece of the cloth—I might have been likened to an ant crawling upon its track, and laying in its stores for the winter ; and during many hours I was kept as busy as an ant might be. The weather still continued calm, but the atmosphere appeared hotter than I had yet felt it, and the perspiration ran from every pore of my skin. I was often obliged to use a loose piece of the broadcloth to wipe the drops from my forehead and out of my eyes ; and at times it appeared as if the heat would suffocate me. But with such a motive as I had for perseverance, I continued to toil on, without thought of resting for a moment.

All the while I was conscious of the presence of the

rats. They appeared to be everywhere around me—in the crevices between the casks and boxes, which they used as so many ways and paths. They met me in my own particular gallery, crossing or running before me, and sometimes I felt them behind me coursing over my legs. Singular enough, I was less afraid of them than formerly. This partially arose from my observance of the fact, that it was the biscuit-box that had brought them in such numbers into my chamber, and not *me*. At first I was under the impression that they had come there to assail myself, but I now thought differently, and felt less apprehension of their attacking me. I no longer dreaded them while awake ; but for all that, I could not have gone to sleep—nor did I intend to do so again—without first securing myself against their attacks.

Another reason there was why I feared them less. My situation had grown more desperate, and the necessity for action so apparent, that all lesser dangers had given way to the greater one that threatened me—the danger of starvation.

Having finished emptying the cloth-case of its contents, I resolved to rest a bit, and refresh myself with a scanty ration of crumbs and a cup of water. During the whole time I was engaged in unpacking I had not left off, even to take a drink, and I was now thirsty enough to drink quarts. As I had no fear that my water supply would run short, I now opened the tap and drank to my satisfaction. I must have lowered the water line very considerably, before I could drag myself away from the butt. The precious fluid seemed sweeter than honey itself ; and after drinking, I felt as though it had re-invigorated me to the tips of my fingers.

I now turned to my stock of food, but another cry of chagrin escaped me as I laid my hands upon the bundle. The rats again ! Yes ; I found, to my astonishment, that these persevering robbers had been back

again, had gnawed a hole through the cloth, and abstracted another portion from my now greatly reduced store ! A pound at least of the precious crumbs had been taken, and this must have been done within a few minutes' time ; for, only a few minutes before, I had occasion to move the bundle, and I had then observed that there was nothing amiss.

The discovery of this new misfortune caused me fresh misery and vexation. I saw that if I left the biscuit-bag behind me, even for the shortest space of time, I might expect on my return to find every crumb gone out of it.

Already I had lost nearly half of what I had taken from the box, and which I had calculated might keep me alive for a period of ten or twelve days. This calculation included everything, even to the dust, which I had carefully gathered up from the boards ; and now, on re-examining what remained, I perceived that there was not enough to sustain me for a week !

This discovery added to the gloom of my situation ; but I did not suffer it to bring despair. I resolved to proceed with my design, as if no new misfortune had happened ; for the further reduction of my stores rendered both energy and perseverance more necessary than ever.

I could not think of any way of securing my crumbs, except by taking the bag along with me and keeping it by my side. I might have folded more cloth around them, but I was impressed with the belief that these vermin would have gnawed their way to my crumbs had I placed them in a box of iron.

To make safe, therefore, I tied up the hole that had been cut in the cloth ; and, dragging the bundle after me, I took it into the cloth-case, determined to defend it against all comers.

Having deposited it between my knees, I once more set to work with my knife to tunnel through the side of the adjacent box.

CHAPTER XLV

ANOTHER BITE

BEFORE proceeding to use the knife, I had endeavoured to burst one of the boards outward, first by pressing upon it with my hands. Finding I could not move it in this way, I lay down upon my back, and tried it with my heels. I even put on my old buskins in hopes of being able to *kick* it out ; but, after thumping at it for a considerable time, I saw it would not do. It was too securely nailed, and, as I found out afterwards, it was still more strongly secured with strips of iron hooping, which would have resisted a stronger effort than any I could make. My kicks and thumps, therefore, were all given to no purpose ; and as soon as I became convinced of this, I went to work with my knife.

I designed cutting across one of the boards near the end—and only at one end, as I could then force the piece out, no matter how securely it might be clasped at the other.

The timber was not very hard, being only common spruce deal, and I could soon have made a cross-cut of the whole piece, even with no better tool than my knife, if I had been in a proper attitude, with the box fairly before me. But instead of that, I was obliged to operate in a constrained position, that was both disadvantageous and fatiguing. Moreover, my hand was still painful from the bite of the rat, the scar not yet being closed up. The troubles I had been enduring had kept my blood in a constant fever, and this I suppose, had prevented the healing of the wound.

Unfortunately, it was my right hand that had been bitten ; and, being right-handed, I could not manage the knife with my left. I tried it at times, to relieve the other, but could make little progress at left-hand work.

For these reasons, then, I was several hours in cutting across a piece of nine-inch deal of only an inch in thickness ; but I got through at last, and then, placing myself once more on my back, and setting my heels to the plank, I had the satisfaction to feel it yielding.

It did not move a great way, and I could perceive that there was something hindering it behind—either another box or a barrel—but this was exactly what I had expected. Only two or three inches of empty space were between the two, and it required a good deal of kicking, and twisting backward and forward, and upward and downward, before I could detach the piece from its fastenings of iron.

Before I had got it quite out of my way, I knew what was behind, for I had passed my fingers through to ascertain. It was another packing-case, and, alas ! too similar to the one I was crouching in. The same kind of timber, if my touch was true—and this one of my senses had of late become wonderfully acute.

I felt its outline, as much of it as I could reach : the same size it appeared to be—the same rough, unplanned plank, just like that I had been cutting at—and both, as I now perceived, iron hooped at the ends. Beyond doubt, it was ‘another of the same’.

I came to this conclusion without proceeding further, and it was a conclusion that filled me with chagrin and disappointment. But although I felt too bitterly satisfied that it was another cloth-box, I deemed it worth while to put the matter beyond any doubt. To effect this, I proceeded to take out one of the pieces of the second box, just as I had done with the other—by making a clear cut across—and then prising it out, and drawing it towards me. It cost me even more labour than the

first, for I could not get at it so well ; besides, I had to widen the aperture in the other, before I could reach the joining between two pieces. The widening was not so difficult, as the soft plank split off readily under the blade of my knife.

I worked cheerlessly at this second box, as I worked without hope. I might have spared myself the pains ; for during the operation the blade of my knife frequently came in contact with what was inside, and I knew from the soft dull object which resisted the steel with elastic silence, that I was coming upon *cloth*. I might have spared myself any further labour, but a kind of involuntary curiosity influenced me to go on—that curiosity which refuses to be satisfied until demonstration is complete and certain ; and, thus impelled, I hewed away mechanically, till I had reached the completion of the task.

The result was as I had expected—the contents were cloth !

The knife dropped from my grasp ; and, overcome, as much by fatigue as by the faintness produced by disappointment, I fell backward, and lay for some minutes in a state of partial insensibility.

This lethargy of despair continued upon me for some time—I noted not how long ; but I was at length aroused from it by an acute pain, which I felt in the tip of my middle finger. It was sudden as acute, and resembled the pricking of a needle, or a sharp cut with the blade of a knife.

I started suddenly up, thinking I had caught hold of my knife—while half conscious of what I was doing—for I remembered that I had thrown it with open blade beside me.

In a second or two, however, I was convinced that it was not that which had caused me the pain. It was not a wound made with cold steel, but with the venomous tooth of a living creature. I had been bitten by a rat !

My lethargic indifference to my situation soon passed away, and was succeeded by a keen sense of fear. I was now convinced, more than ever, that my life was in danger from these hideous animals ; for this was the first actual attempt they had made upon my person *without provocation*. Although my sudden movement, and the loud cries I involuntarily uttered, had once more driven them off, I felt satisfied they would become bolder anon, and take no heed of such idle demonstrations. I had threatened them too often, without making them feel my power to punish them.

Clearly it would not do to go to sleep again, with my person exposed to their attacks ; for although my hopes of ultimate deliverance were now sadly diminished, and in all likelihood starvation was to be my fate, still this kind of death was preferable to being eaten up by rats. The very thought of such a fate filled me with horror, and determined me to do all in my power to save myself from so fearful a doom.

I was now very tired, and required rest. The box was large enough for me to have slept within it, stretched at full length ; but I thought I could more easily defend myself against the encroachments of the rats in my old quarters ; and, taking up my knife and bundle, I crawled back behind the butt.

My little chamber was now of much smaller dimensions, for in it I had stowed the cloth taken from the box. In fact, there was just room enough for my body and the bag of crumbs—so that it was more like a nest than an apartment.

With the pieces of cloth piled in one end against the brandy-cask, I was well defended in that quarter, and it only remained to close up the other end as I had done before. This I accomplished ; and then, after eating my slender supper, and washing it down with copious libations, I sought the repose, both of body and mind, of which I stood in such need.

CHAPTER XLVI

THE BALE OF LINEN

My sleep was neither very sweet nor very sound. In addition to my gloomy prospects, I was rendered uncomfortable by the hot atmosphere, now closer than ever, in consequence of the stoppage of every aperture. No current of air, that might otherwise have cooled me, was permitted to reach my prison, and I might almost as well have been inside a heated oven. I got a little sleep, however, and with that little I was under the necessity of being satisfied.

When fairly awake again, I treated myself to a meal, which might be called my breakfast ; but it was certainly the lightest of all breakfasts, and did not deserve the name. Of water I again drank freely, for I was thirsty with the fever that was in my blood, and my head ached as if it would split open.

All this did not deter me from returning to my work. If two boxes contained broadcloth, it did not follow that all the cargo was of this sort of merchandise, and I resolved to persevere. I had made up my mind to try in a new direction—that is, to tunnel through the end of the packing-case as I had done through its side—the end which was turned towards the outside—for I knew that the other rested against the side of the ship, and it would be no use searching in that direction.

Taking my bread-bag with me as before, I went to work with renewed hope, and after long and severe

labour—severe on account of the crouching attitude I had to keep, as also from the pain caused by my wounded thumb—I succeeded in detaching one of the end pieces from its place.

Something *soft* lay beyond. There was encouragement even in this. At all events, it was not another case of broadcloth ; but what it was, I could not guess until I had laid bare the full breadth of the board. Then my hands were eagerly passed through the aperture, and with trembling fingers I examined this new object of interest. Coarse canvas it appeared to the touch ; but that was only the covering. What was there inside ?

Until I had taken up my knife again, and cut off a portion of the canvas, I knew not what it was ; but then, to my bitter disappointment, the real nature of the package was revealed.

It proved to be *linen*—a bale of fine linen, packed in pieces, just as the cloth had been ; but so tight that if I had used all my strength I could not have detached one piece from the bale.

The discovery of what it was, caused me greater chagrin than if it had proved to be broadcloth. This I could take out with less difficulty, and make way to try farther on ; but with the linen I could do nothing, for, after several attempts, I was unable to move any of the pieces, and as to cutting a way through them, a wall of adamant would scarce have been more impervious to the blade of my knife. It would have been the work of a week at least. My provision would not keep me alive till I had reached the other side. But I did not speculate on such a performance. It was too manifestly impossible, and I turned away from it without giving it another thought.

For a little while I remained inactive, considering what should be my next movement. I did not rest long. Time was too precious to be wasted in mere

reflection. Action alone could save me ; and, spurred on by this thought, I was soon at work again.

My new design was simply to clear out the cloth from the second box, cut through its farther side, and find out what lay in that direction.

As I had already made a way into the box, the first thing was to remove the cloth. For the time my knife was laid aside, and I commenced pulling out the pieces. It was no light labour, getting out the first three or four. Unfortunately, the ends of the webs were towards me, and this rendered it more difficult to separate them ; but I continued to tug and pull until I had extracted a few ; and then the work became easier.

Just as in the other case, I found large coarse pieces that would not pass through the aperture I had made ; and not liking to take the pains to make a wider opening in the wood, I adopted the same plan I had tried before ; that is, to cut the cloth loose from its fastenings, unroll it, and draw it out by the yard.

This was easier, I thought ; but, alas ! it proved the source of a new and unexpected dilemma, as I had occasion soon after to perceive.

I was getting on well enough, and had succeeded in clearing out a space almost large enough to work in, when I was suddenly brought to a stop, by finding that I had no room for any more cloth *behind me* ! The whole of the open space—including my little apartment, the biscuit-box, and the other case—was quite full, for I had filled each in succession as I went along. There was not a foot of space left—not so much as would hold another web !

This discovery did not create an immediate alarm ; for I did not at first perceive the full consequence of it. It was only after a little reflection, that I recognized the difficulty ; and then I saw that it was indeed a difficulty—a very dangerous dilemma.

It was plain that I could proceed no farther in my

work without clearing off the 'back-water' that I had so thoughtlessly accumulated ; and how was this to be done ? I could not destroy the cloth by burning, nor in any other way that I could think of. I could not lessen its bulk, for I had already pressed it together as closely as I had strength. How, then, was it to be disposed of ?

I now perceived the imprudence I had committed in unrolling the webs. This was the cause of its having increased so in bulk though not altogether, for the very taking out of the pieces—on account of the tight pressure they had originally undergone while being packed in the cases—of itself greatly enlarged their mass. To restore them to the state in which I had found them, was no longer possible. They were littered through and through in the most complete confusion, and I had no room to work in, even to refold them again, since I could scarce move about in the constrained quarters and attitude I was compelled to assume. Even had I had ample space to work in, I could not easily have got the stuff back to a suitable bulk ; for the coarser material, elastic as it was, would have required a screw-press to bring it to its former size. I felt quite disheartened as I thought the thing over—more than disheartened, again almost despairing.

But, no ! it had not yet reached the point of despair with me. By getting enough space for another piece or two, I should have room to cut a hole through the opposite side of the box, and there was still hope beyond. If, indeed, another case of broadcloth, or another bale of linen, should be found there, it would then be time to yield myself up to despair.

But hope in the human breast is hard to destroy, and it was so in mine. So long as there is life, thought I, let there be hope ; and, inspired with the old proverb, I renewed my exertions.

After awhile, I succeeded in stowing away two

more pieces ; and this gave me just room to creep inside the now nearly empty box, and go to work again with my knife.

This time I had to cut the board across the middle, as the cloth on both sides would not permit me to get at either end. It made little difference, however ; and when I had finished carving at the wood, I was able to push out both sections, and make an aperture sufficient for my purpose. I say sufficient for my purpose, for it only needed a hole large enough to admit my hand ; and, once protruding my fingers, I was satisfied, as before, with a most melancholy result. *Another bale of linen !*

Fatigued and faint, I could have fallen, had it been possible to fall lower ; but I was already upon my face, alike prostrate in body and soul !

CHAPTER XLVII

EXCELSIOR

It was some time before I recovered strength or spirit to arouse myself. But for hunger, I might have remained longer in the sort of torpid lethargy into which I had fallen ; but nature craved loudly for sustenance. I could have eaten my crumbs where I lay, and would have done so, but that thirst carried me back to my old quarters. It made little difference where I slept, as I could have fenced myself against the rats within either of the boxes ; but it was necessary to be near the water-butt, and this alone influenced me in the choice of my sleeping-place.

It was not such an easy matter getting back to my former position. Many pieces of cloth had to be lifted out of the way and drawn behind me. They had to be placed carefully, else on reaching the entrance to my chamber, I should not be able to clear a space large enough to contain my body.

I succeeded, however, in effecting my purpose ; and having eaten my morsel, and quenched my feverish thirst, I fell back upon the mass of cloth, and was asleep in the twinkling of an eye.

I had taken the usual precaution to close the gates of my fortress, and this time I slept my sleep out, undisturbed by the rats.

In the morning—or rather, I should say, in the hour of my awaking—I again ate and drank. I know not whether it was morning ; for, in consequence of my watch having once or twice run down, I could no

longer tell night from day ; and my sleep, now not regular as formerly, failed to inform me of the hours. What I ate failed to satisfy hunger. All the food that was left me would not have sufficed for that ; and not the least difficult part I had to perform, was the restraining myself from eating out my whole stock at a meal. I could easily have done it, and it required all my resolution to refrain. But my resolution was backed by the too certain knowledge that such a meal would be my last, and my abstinence was strengthened simply by the fear of starvation.

Having breakfasted, then, as sparingly as possible, and filled my stomach with water instead of food, I once more worked my way into the second cloth-box, determined to continue my search as long as strength was left me. There was not much left now. I knew that what I ate was barely sufficient to sustain life, and I felt that I was fast wasting away. My ribs projected like those of a skeleton, and it was as much as I could do to move the heavier pieces of the cloth.

One end of all the boxes, as already stated, was placed against the side of the ship. Of course, it was of no use tunnelling in that direction ; but the end of the second case, which faced inwards, I had not yet tried. This was now my task.

I need not detail the particulars of the work. It resembled that I had executed already, and lasted for several successive hours. The result was, once again, a painful disappointment. Another bale of linen ! I could go no farther in that direction. And now no farther in any direction !

Boxes of broadcloth and bales of linen were all around me. I could not penetrate beyond. I could not make a way through them. There was no room for further progress.

This was the melancholy conclusion at which I had arrived, and I was once more thrown back into my despairing mood.

Fortunately, this did not last long, for shortly after a train of thought came into my mind that prompted me to further action. It was memory that came to my aid. I remembered having read a book, which described very beautifully the struggles of a boy, amidst great difficulties—how he bravely refused to yield to each new disappointment; but, by dint of courage and perseverance, overcame every obstacle, and at last obtained success. I remembered, too, that this boy had adopted for his motto, the Latin word ‘*Excelsior*’, which was explained to mean ‘*higher*’ or ‘*upward*’.

On reflecting upon the struggles which this boy had undergone, and how he had succeeded in surmounting so many difficulties—some even as great as those that surrounded myself—I was nerved to make a new effort.

But I believe it was this peculiar word, ‘*Excelsior*’, that guided me in my after proceedings, for by its most literal sense was I directed. *Upward*, thought I; I might search upward. Why did it not occur to me before? There might be food in this direction, as likely as in any other, and certainly I had no choice, as every other direction had been tried. I resolved, then, to search *upward*.

In another minute I was upon my back, knife in hand. I propped myself with pieces of cloth, so that I might work more conveniently, and after groping out one of the divisions of the lid, I commenced notching it crossways.

The board at length gave way to my exertions. I dragged it downwards. Oh, heavens! were my hopes again destined to suffer defeat and mockery?

Alas! it was even so. The coarse, hard-grained canvas, with the dull sodden mass behind it, answered me with a sad affirmative.

There yet remained the upper side of the other case, and then that of the biscuit-box. Both should be

tried as a last effort, and that before I could again sleep.

And both *were* tried, with like evil fortune. Upon the former rested a case of the cloth, while another bale of linen completely covered the top of the latter.

‘Merciful God ! am I forsaken ? ’

Such was my exclamation as I sank back into an attitude of complete exhaustion.

CHAPTER XLVIII

A TORRENT OF BRANDY

SLEEP followed, brought on by weariness and long exertion ; and when I awoke, I felt my strength greatly restored. Singular enough, my spirits were a good deal lighter, and I was far less despairing than I had been before. It seemed as if some supernatural influence sustained me—perhaps an inspiration given by the great Creator himself, to enable me to persevere. Notwithstanding that my disappointments had been many and oft-repeated, I bore up under the infliction as meekly as I could, and never yet had I felt in my heart a rebellious feeling against God.

I still continued to offer up prayers for my success, and to place reliance upon the hope that His mercy would yet be extended to me. This feeling it was—I am sure it was—that upheld me, and kept me from falling into utter despondency.

On awaking again, as I have said, my spirits felt lighter, though I know not why, unless it was that I was cheered by some influence from above. I can only account for it in this way, since there was no change in the circumstances that surrounded me—at least none for the better—nor had I conceived any new hope or plan.

It was certain that I could penetrate no further through the boxes of cloth and bales of linen, as I had no place to stow their contents behind me. That side, therefore, was now no longer the object of my attention.

There were still two other directions in which I might search—the one directly in front, and that toward the left, which last I knew to be in the direction of the bows of the ship.

In front, the space was taken up by the great water-butt, and of course I did not think of cutting a way through this. It would lead to the loss of my supply of water. I did for a moment imagine that I might make a hole high up above the water-line, through which I might squeeze my body, and then get through to the opposite side by making a second hole. I knew that the butt was now scarce half full, as the heat had kept me almost continually athirst, and, confident in my supply, I had drunk large quantities. But it occurred to me that if I made this great opening, I might lose all my water in a single night. A sudden squall might arise—for several had been encountered already—and set the ship a-rolling. In that case, if the vessel, crank as she was, came near getting upon her beam-ends, which she often did, my butt would be turned half over, and the water of course would all escape—the precious water that had hitherto stood my friend, and but for which I should have long ago miserably perished.

Another consideration influenced me not to touch the butt: there was an easier direction to proceed in, and that was *through the brandy-cask*.

This stood end towards me, and, as already stated, shut me in upon the left. Its head or bottom—I could not say which—lay quite up against the end of the water-butt; but for some reason it had been cleeted closer up to the side timbers of the ship, so that there was hardly any vacant space behind it. For this reason, nearly one half of its diameter overlapped the end of the water-butt—the other half completing the enclosure of my cabin.

Through this last half I resolved to cut my way, and then, creeping inside the cask, to make an-

other hole that would let me through its opposite side.

Perhaps, beyond the brandy-cask I might find food and safety? It was only blind guessing on my part; but I again prayed for success.

Making an incision across the thick oak plank that formed the bottom staves, was a very different affair from cutting through soft spruce deal, and I progressed but slowly. A beginning had already been made, however, where I had formerly tapped the cask; and entering my blade at this same hole, I worked away until I had cut one of the pieces clear across. I then put on my buskins, and, getting upon my back, kicked upon the stave with all my might, using my heels as a trip-hammer. It was a stiff job; for the piece, being jointed into the others on both sides, refused for a long time to yield. But the constant hammering at length loosened it, by breaking off one of the joinings, and I had the satisfaction to find that it was giving way. A few more strong finishing blows did the business, and the stave was at length forced inward.

The immediate result was a gush of brandy that completely overwhelmed me. It rushed over me, not in a jet but in a grand volume as thick as my body; and before I could raise myself into an erect position, it was all over and around me, so that I had a fear I was going to be drowned in it! The whole space I occupied was filled up, and it was only by holding my head close up to the ship's timbers that I could keep my mouth clear of being filled. At the first gush, a quantity had got into my throat, and eyes as well, and well-nigh choked and blinded me; and it was some time before I got over the fit of coughing and sneezing which it had suddenly brought on.

I was in no mood to be merry at the time; yet strange enough, I could not help thinking of the Duke

of Clarence and his odd fancy of being drowned in the butt of malmsey.

The singular flood subsided almost as rapidly as it had risen. There was plenty of space for it down below; and in a few seconds' time it had all gone down to mix among the bilge-water, and jabble about during the remainder of the voyage. The only traces it had left were in my wet clothes, and the strong alcoholic smell that filled the atmosphere around me, and almost hindered me from getting breath.

As the ship's head rose upon the waves, the cask was tilted upwards, and this movement in ten minutes emptied it so completely that not a single pint remained inside.

But I had not waited for this. The stave I had kicked out left an aperture large enough to admit my body—it did not need to be very large for that—and as soon as my coughing fit had ended, I squeezed myself through to the inside of the cask.

I groped around for the bung, believing that this would be the best place to cut across one of the staves. The hole, usually a large one, would admit the blade of my knife, and would be so much of my work done to hand. I found the place easily enough, and fortunately it was not on the top, where I fancied it might be, but on the side, and just at a convenient height. Closing the blade of my knife, I hammered on the wooden plug with the half. After a few strokes, I succeeded in forcing it outwards, and then set to work to make the cross-cut of the stave.

I had not made a dozen notches, before I felt my strength wonderfully increased. I had been weak before, but now it appeared to me as if I could push out the staves without cutting them. I felt in a measure cheerful, as if I had been merely working for the play of the thing, and it was of but little consequence whether I succeeded or not. I have some recollection that I both whistled and sang as I worked.

The idea that I was in any danger of losing my life quite forsook me, and all the hardships through which I had been passing appeared to have been only imaginary—a chimera of my brain, or, at most, only a dream.

Just then I was seized with a terrible fit of thirst, and I remember making a struggle to get out of the brandy-cask for the purpose of having a drink from the water-butt. I must have succeeded in getting out of the cask, but whether I actually did drink at the time, I could never be certain ; for after that I remembered nothing more, but was for a long while as completely unconscious as if I had been dead !

CHAPTER XLIX

A NEW DANGER

I REMAINED in this state of insensibility for several hours, and was not even troubled, as was usual when I slept, with painful dreams. I did not dream at all ; but, on awaking to consciousness, I had a dread feeling upon me, just as if I had been cast from off the earth into infinite space, and was rapidly floating onwards, or falling from some great height, without ever reaching a point of rest. It was a feeling of a most unpleasant kind—in fact, a feeling of horror.

Fortunately, it did not continue long ; and as I endeavoured to rouse myself it became less painful, and at length passed away. In its stead, however, I felt sick at the stomach, and my head ached as though it would split. Surely it was not the sea that had made me sick ? No, it could not be that. I was long since hardened against sea-sickness. Even another storm would not have brought it on ; but there was no particular roughness. The ship was sailing under breezy but not stormy weather.

Was it fever that had suddenly attacked me in a violent manner ? or had I fainted from want of strength ? No ; I had experienced both calamities, but this new sensation resembled neither.

I was in reality at a loss to account for what was ailing me. In a short time, however, my thoughts became clearer, and then the truth dawned upon my mind. I had been in a *state of intoxication* !

Intoxication it must have been, though wine I

had not tasted, nor brandy neither—not a mouthful. I disliked it too much for that ; and although there was plenty of it—or had been, for it was now all gone—enough to have drowned myself in, I was not conscious of having drunk a drop of it. True, a drop had passed into my mouth—a drop, or maybe a spoonful, had gone down my throat when the torrent gushed over me ; but surely this small quantity could not have produced intoxication, even if it had been liquor ever so much *above proof* ? Impossible ; it could not have been that that produced intoxication !

And what, then ? Something had made me *drunk*. Although I had never been so in my life, yet I guessed the symptoms to mean only this.

As I continued to reflect—that is, as I grew more *sober*—the mystery was cleared up, and I discovered the cause of my intoxication. It was not brandy, but the ‘fumes’ of brandy, that had done it—this, and nothing else.

Even before entering the cask, I had noticed a decided change in my feelings, for the fumes of the liquor, even outside, were strong enough to make me sneeze ; but this was nothing to the effluvia which I encountered inside the vessel. At first I could scarcely breathe, but by little and little I became accustomed to it, and rather liked it. No wonder, since it was making me feel so strong and happy !

On cogitating further on this singular incident, I remembered how I came to be outside the cask—how thirst had influenced me to come out ; and I now perceived how fortunate it was that I had followed the guidance of this appetite. I have said that I did not know whether I had actually quenched my thirst. I had no remembrance of going to the butt, or of drawing a cup of water. I think I did not get so far. Had I done so, in all probability I should have left out the vent-peg, and then a large quantity of water would have been spilled. The water-line

would have been down to a level with the vent ; and this, on examination, I gladly perceived was not the case. Moreover, my drinking-cup felt too dry to have been used lately. I had not drunk, then, and this was a fortunate circumstance, though far more fortunate was the circumstance that I had thirsted. Had it not been for this, I should no doubt have remained inside the cask, and the consequence must have been disastrous indeed. I cannot say what, but certainly some fatal result would have followed. In all likelihood, I should have remained in a state of intoxication—how was I ever to get sober?—every moment getting worse, until when? Until death ! Who knows ?

A mere accidental circumstance, then, had once more saved my life ; but perhaps it was not accidental. It may have been the hand of Providence, and I believed so at the time. If prayers express gratitude, mine were given, and with all the fervour of my soul.

Whether I had allayed my thirst or not, certain it was that the quenching had been but temporary ; for I now felt as if I could drink the butt dry. I lost no time in groping for my cup, and I am sure I did not leave off till I had drunk nearly half a gallon of water.

The water removed a good deal of the sickness, and also cleared my brains, as if it had washed them. Being once more restored to my proper senses, I returned to the consideration of the perils by which I was surrounded.

My first thought was about continuing the work I had so abruptly left off, and only now did it occur to me that I might not *be able* to go on with it. What if I was to get into the same state as before—what if my senses again became stupefied, and I should not have presence of mind or resolution to come out of the cask ?

Perhaps I might labour away for awhile without

getting into the same state, and if I felt it coming on me I could hasten out? Perhaps! But should it be otherwise? If the intoxication should come suddenly upon me, how then? How long had it been before I felt it on the former occasion? I tried to remember, but could not.

I remembered how this strange influence had stolen over me—how soothingly and sweetly it came, wrapping my senses as if in a delightful dream. How it had made me reckless of consequences, forgetful even of my appalling situation!

Supposing that all was to be repeated—the same scene to be enacted over again—and only one incident to be left out: that is, the thirst which brought me forth from the cask—supposing all this? And why might it not be just what would take place? I could not answer the question one way or the other; but so strong were my apprehensions of the probability that it might, that I hesitated *to re-enter the cask!*

There was no help for it, however. I must either do so, or die where I lay. If death in the end was to be my fate, better far, thought I, to die by this apparently easy mode; for I felt convinced, from the experience I had had, that such death would be without a pang.

The reflection emboldened me, as well as the knowledge that I had no alternative, no choice of plan; and again pronouncing a prayer, I crawled back into the brandy-cask.

CHAPTER L

WHERE WAS MY KNIFE ?

ON entering, I groped about for my knife. I had quite forgotten how or where I had laid it down. I had already searched for it outside, but without success ; and I concluded that I must have left it behind me in the cask. I was surprised at not laying my hand upon it at once, for although I ran my fingers all around the under side of the vessel, nothing like a knife did I touch.

I was beginning to feel alarmed about it. It might be lost, and if so, all hopes of deliverance would be at an end. Without the knife, I could proceed no farther in any direction, but might lie down inactive to abide my fate. Where could the knife be ? Was it likely that the rats had carried it off ?

I again backed out of the cask, and made a new search outside ; but not finding what I was looking for, I once more crept into the barrel, and once more felt it all over—that is, every part of it where a knife could lie.

I was very near going out again, when it occurred to me to raise my hands a little higher, and examine the bung-hole, at which I had been working when I last had the knife in my hands. It may be there, thought I ; and to my joy it *was* there, sticking in the notch I had been cutting with it.

I set to work, without further delay, to widen the hole crossways ; but the blade, from so much use, had become ‘dull as a beetle’, and my progress

through the hard oaken stave was as slow as if I had been cutting through a stone. I carved away for a quarter of an hour, without making the notch the eighth part of an inch deeper ; and I almost despaired of ever getting through the stave.

I now felt the singular influence again coming over me, and could have remained without much fear, for such is the effect of intoxication ; but I had promised myself that the moment I became aware of any change, I should retreat from the dangerous spot. Fortunately, I had resolution, and barely enough, to keep my promise ; and, before it was too late, I dragged myself back to the rear of the water-butt.

It was well I did so at the very time, for had I remained in the brandy-cask but ten minutes longer, beyond doubt I should have been hopelessly insensible. As it was, I already felt quite 'happy', and remained so for some time.

But as the alcoholic influence departed, I grew more miserable than ever ; for I now perceived that this unexpected obstacle to my progress was about to ruin all my hopes. I believed that I could return at intervals, and go on with the work ; but only at long intervals, and now that the blade of my knife had grown so blunt, I could make but little progress. It would be days before I should get through the side of the cask ; and days were denied me. The small store of crumbs were sadly reduced ; in fact, I was on my last handful. I had not enough to keep me alive for three days ! The chances of saving my life were growing narrower with every fresh move, and I was fast giving way to despair. Had I been sure that after cutting through the cask, I should have found relief on the other side, I might have contemplated the enterprise with more eagerness and energy ; but this was worse than doubtful. There were ten chances to one against my finding a box of biscuits, or anything that was eatable.

One advantage had arisen from my breaking into the brandy-cask, which now occurred to me in full force. It had given me a large empty space ; and therefore, if I could only get beyond—even though there should not be a package containing food—still it might be something which I could remove into the inside of the cask, and thus make way for further operations.

This was certainly a fresh phase which my situation had assumed ; but a still better idea succeeded, that lent a new and joyous aspect to my thoughts. It was this : if I could so easily cut my way from box to box, as I had already proved, *why might I not tunnel upwards, and reach the deck ?*

The thought startled me. It was quite new. It had not occurred to me before—strangely enough it had not—and I can only explain its tardy conception by the fact of the confused state of mind in which I had all along been, and which might have led me to deem such an enterprise an impossibility.

No doubt there were numberless packages heaped over me, one upon another. No doubt the hold was quite full of them, and I knew that I was near the bottom of all. I remembered, too—what had puzzled me at the time—that the stowage had continued for a long time after I came aboard ; that for two days and nights the work seemed to be going on, and therefore the whole cargo must have been placed above me. Still, withal, a dozen large boxes would reach to the top, or, maybe, not half so many would fill up to the deck. Allowing a day to the cutting through each one, I might be able to reach the top in about a week or ten days !

Though a joyful thought, it would have been far more welcome at an earlier period, but it now came accompanied by the wildest regrets. Perhaps it had come too late to save me ? Had I begun aright, when I had my full box of biscuits, I might easily have

carried the plan into execution ; but now, alas ! scarce a morsel remained ; and it seemed hopeless to attempt what I had conceived.

Still, I could not surrender up this alluring prospect of life and freedom ; and, stifling all idle regrets, I gave my mind to its further consideration.

Time, of course, was now the important matter, and that which caused me the greatest anxiety. I feared that even before I could accomplish an opening on the farther side of the empty barrel, my food would be all consumed, and my strength quite exhausted. Perhaps I should die in the middle of my work—literally ‘in the breach’.

While pondering thus, another new thought came uppermost in my mind. It was also a good idea, however horrid it may seem to those who do not hunger. But hunger and the dread of starvation have the effect of simplifying the choice of a man’s appetite, and under such circumstances the stomach ceases to be dainty.

Mine had long since lost all niceness ; and was no longer squeamish as to the sort of food I might swallow. In fact, *I could have eaten anything that was eatable.* And now for the new idea.

CHAPTER LI

A GRAND RAT-TRAP

FOR some time I have said nothing of the *rats*. Do not fancy, from this silence about them, that they had gone away and left me to myself! They had done no such thing. They were around and about me, as brisk as ever, and as troublesome. Bolder they could not have been, unless they had positively assailed me; and no doubt such would have been the case, had I exposed myself to their attack.

But, whenever I moved, my first care had been to close them out, by means of walls, which I constructed with pieces of cloth, and thus only had I kept them at bay. Now and then, when I had passed from place to place, I could hear and feel them all around me; and twice or three times had I been bitten by one or another. It was only by exercising extreme vigilance and caution, that I was enabled to keep them from attacking me.

This parenthesis will, no doubt, lead you to anticipate what I am coming to, and enable you to guess what was the idea that had taken possession of my mind. It had occurred to me, then, that instead of letting the rats eat me, *I should eat them*. That was it exactly.

I felt no disgust at the thought of such food; nor would you, if placed in a situation similar to mine. On the contrary, I hailed the idea as a welcome one, since it promised to enable me to carry out my plan of cutting my way up to the deck—in other words, of *saving my life*. Indeed, as soon as I had conceived it,

I felt as if I was actually saved. It only remained to carry out the intention.

I knew there were many rats—too many, I had thought before—but now I cared not how plentiful they were. At all events, there were enough of them to ‘ration’ me for a long while—I hoped long enough for my purpose. The question was, how should I capture them?

I could think of no other way but by feeling for them with my hands, and boldly grasping them, one at a time, and so squeezing the life out of them. I had already given my attention to trapping them, without success. I had, as you know, killed one, by the only ingenuity I could think of, and likely enough I might get one or two more in the same way, but it was just as likely I might not; or even if I succeeded in killing one or two, the rest might become shy of me, and then the supply would stop. Better, therefore, to consider some plan for capturing a large number of them at once, and so have a larder that would last me for ten or twelve days. Perhaps by that time I might be within reach of more palatable food. This would be wiser, as well as safer; and I remained for a long while considering how I should make a wholesale capture.

Necessity is the parent of invention; and I suppose, by the help of this, more than from any real genius I possessed for contriving, I at last succeeded in sketching out the plan of a rat-trap. It was certainly of the simplest kind, but I felt pretty sure it would be effective. I should make me a large bag out of the broad-cloth, which I could easily do, by cutting a piece of the proper length, and sewing up the two sides with a string. Strings I had in plenty for the rolls of cloth had been tied with strong pieces of twine, and of course these were at hand. I should use the blade of my knife for a needle, and by the same instrument I should be enabled to reeve round the mouth of the bag a strong piece of the twine, to act as a draw-string.

I not only *should* do all this, but *did* it without further delay ; for in less than an hour I had my bag (net, I called it) quite finished, draw-string rove around the mouth, and all complete for action.

CHAPTER LII

A WHOLESALE TAKE

I NOW proceeded to the further carrying out of my design, which had all been matured while I was working at the bag. The next step was the 'setting of the net', and this was done as follows:—

I first cleared away the loose bundles so as to make a large space—in fact, the whole of my original apartment. This I was able to accomplish by means of the empty brandy-cask, which I had now filled with broad-cloth. I also stopped up every aperture and crevice as before, leaving only one large one—that which I knew the rats were accustomed to use as their principal entrance.

Right in front of this I placed my bag, with its opened mouth covering the whole aperture, and with the remainder kept in a state of extension by means of several props of sticks, which I had cut for the purpose to a proper length. Then placing myself on my knees by the mouth of the bag, I held it wide open, and also kept the draw-string ready between my fingers. In this attitude I awaited the coming of the rats.

I knew they would enter the bag, for I had there placed a bait for them. This bait consisted of some crumbs of biscuit—the very last I had—as sailors would say, the 'last shot in the locker'. I was risking all upon the cast; and should the rats eat all up and then escape, I should not have a scrap left me for another meal.

I knew some of them would come, but I was in doubt whether they might arrive in numbers sufficient to make a good *haul*. I feared they might come one at a time, and thus carry off the bait piece-meal; and to prevent this, I had ground the crumbs to very dust. This, I thought, would delay the first comers until a large assemblage had got into the bag, and then it was my intention to cut off their retreat by drawing the string upon them.

Fortune favoured me. I had not been upon my knees more than a minute, when I heard the pattering of the little paws of the rats outside, and also the occasional 'queek-queek' of their sharp voices. In another second or two, I felt the bag moving between my fingers, and knew that my victims were creeping inside. The shaking of the cloth became more violent, and I was able to perceive that large numbers were crowding in, eager to get part of the powdered biscuits. I could feel them scrambling about, leaping over one another, and squealing as they quarrelled.

This was my cue for drawing the string; and in the next instant I had it pulled all taut, and the mouth of the bag gathered close and firmly tied.

Not a rat that had entered got out again; and I had the satisfaction to find that the bag was about half full of these savage creatures.

I lost no time in taming them, however; and this I effected in a somewhat original manner.

There was one part of the floor of my apartment that was level and firm. By removing the cloth off it, it was quite hard, being the oak timbers of the ship itself. Upon this I deposited the bag of rats, and then, laying a large piece of deal board on the top, I mounted on this board, upon my knees, and then pressed it downward with all my weight and strength.

For awhile the bag underneath felt as elastic as a spring mattress, and heaved upward with a tendency to roll from under the board, but I replaced the latter

with my hands, and then pounced upon it as before. There was, no doubt, a deal of kicking, and scrambling, and biting within the bag, and I am sure there was plenty of squealing, for that I heard. I gave no heed to such demonstrations, but kept churning on till every motion had ceased, and all was silence underneath.

I now ventured to take up the bag, and examine its contents. I was gratified at the wholesale slaughter I had committed. There was evidently a large number of rats within the trap, and every one of them dead as a door-nail !

At all events, none of them seemed to be stirring, for when I held the bag up by its mouth, it hung down perfectly still, and there was neither kick nor squeak inside ; and therefore I took it for granted that I had killed them all.

Notwithstanding this belief, when I proceeded to count them, I inserted my hand with great caution, and drew them one by one out of the bag. There were ten of them !

‘Ha ! ha !’ exclaimed I, apostrophizing the dead rats, ‘I’ve got you at last, you ugly brutes ! and this serves you right for the trouble you have put me to. If one good turn deserves another, I suppose so does one evil one. Had you let me and mine alone, this ill fortune might not have befallen you. But you left me no alternative. You ate my biscuits, and, to save myself from starving, I am compelled to eat you !’

This apostrophe ended, I commenced skinning one of the rats, with the intention of dining upon him.

You may fancy that I anticipated the meal with a feeling of disgust, but in this you would be greatly mistaken. Hunger had cured me of all daintiness. I had not the slightest repugnance for the food of which I was about to partake. On the contrary, I longed to be at it, as much as you might do for a dinner of the most delicate viands.

So keen was my hunger, that I could hardly wait till

I had stripped off the skin ; and five minutes after this operation was finished, I had bolted the rat raw—body, bones, and all !

If you are anxious to know how it tasted I can only tell you that I observed nothing disagreeable about it, no more than if it had been the leg of a fowl or a slice off the most delicate mutton. It was the first flesh-meat I had eaten for weeks, and this may have added to my zest for such food. Certainly I thought, at the time, that a sweeter morsel had never gone down my throat, and no longer felt wonder at what books had told me about the rat-eating Laplanders.

CHAPTER LIII

ABOUT FACE !

THE aspect of my affairs had now undergone a complete change for the better. My larder was replenished with store enough to last me for ten days, at the least ; for I made a sort of resolution that my future ration should be one rat per diem. In ten days what might I not effect ? Surely I should be able to accomplish the great feat which I ought to have attempted at the first, but which, as ill fortune would have it, I had hitherto considered impossible—that is, to cut my way to the deck.

A rat a day, reflected I, will not only keep me alive, but restore some of my spent strength ; and labouring constantly for ten days, I should be almost certain to reach the topmost tier of the cargo. Perhaps in less time ? If less, all the better ; but certainly in ten days I might get through them all, even though there should be ten tiers of boxes between me and the upper deck.

Such were the new hopes with which the successful rat-catching had inspired me, and my mind was restored to a state of confidence and equanimity that had long been stranger to it.

I had one apprehension that still slightly troubled me, and that was about getting through the cask. It was not the fear of the time it might take, for I no longer believed that I should be pinched for time ; but I was still in dread lest the fumes of the brandy (which inside

the cask were as strong as ever) might again overcome my senses, despite all my resolution to guard against a too long exposure to them. Even when I had entered the cask on the second occasion, it was as much as I could do to drag myself out of it again.

I resolved, however, to steel myself against the seductions of the potent spirit that dwelt within the great barrel, and retreat before I felt its influence too strong to be resisted.

Notwithstanding that I was now more confident as regarded time, I had no thought of wasting it in idleness ; and as soon as my dinner was washed down by a copious libation from the water-butt, I possessed myself once more of my knife, and proceeded towards the empty cask, to take a new spell at enlarging the bung-hole.

Ha ! the cask was not empty. It was full of cloth. In the excitement of trapping the 'vermin,' I had forgotten the circumstance of my having placed the cloth within the empty barrel.

Of course, thought I, I must remove it again, in order to make room for my work ; and laying aside the knife, I commenced pulling out the pieces.

While thus engaged, a new reflection arose, and I asked myself some questions, to the following effect :—

Why am I removing the cloth from the brandy-cask ? Why not let it remain there ? Why try to go through the cask at all ?

Certainly there was no reason why I should proceed in that direction. There *had been*, at an earlier period—while I was only searching for food, and not thinking of the object I now desired and hoped to accomplish—but for my newly-conceived enterprise there was no necessity to cut through the cask at all. On the contrary, it would be the worst direction I could take. It did not lie in the line which would lead to the hatch-way, and that was the line in which my tunnel ought to point. I was pretty certain as to the direction of

the hatch, for I remembered how I passed from it to the water-butt when I first came into the hold.

I had struck sharply to the right, and gone in a nearly direct line for the end of the butt. All these little points I distinctly remembered, and I was confident that my position was somewhere near the middle of the ship, on the side which sailors would call the 'starboard beam'. To go through the cask, therefore, would lead me too far aft of the main-hatchway, which was that by which I had come down. Moreover, there was still the difficulty of broaching the side of the cask—greatly exaggerated, of course, by the dangerous atmosphere I should be compelled to breathe while effecting it.

Why, then, should I attempt it at all? Why not return, and proceed once more in the direction of the boxes? Circumstances were changed since I was last there. I could now find vent for my 'back-water', since the empty cask would serve for that, in one case as well as the other. Besides, it would be much easier to cut through the deal board than the hard oak; and, moreover, I had made some progress in that—the right—direction already. Therefore, considering all things—the danger as well as the difficulty—I came to the conclusion that, by tunnelling through the cask, I would be heading the wrong way; and, in this belief, I turned right about, determined to take the other.

Before proceeding to the boxes, I repacked the cloth into the cask, and added more, placing it piece by piece, with sufficient care, and afterwards wedging it in as tightly as my strength would permit.

I was considerate, also, to return my nine rats to the bag, and draw the string; for I suspected that I had not killed all the rats in the ship, and I feared that the comrades of the defunct nine might take a fancy to eat their old shipmates. This I had been told was not an uncommon habit of the hideous brutes, and I

determined to guard against it, so far as my victims were concerned.

When these arrangements were completed, I swallowed a fresh cup of water, and crawled once more into one of the empty boxes.

CHAPTER LIV

CONJECTURES

IT was into the cloth-case which I had entered—that one which lay contiguous to the box that had contained the biscuits. It was from it I determined to start with my new tunnel ; and I had two reasons for making it my terminus : first, because I believed that it was situated almost in a direct line with the main hatchway. For that matter, so too was the biscuit-box ; but the latter was smaller than the cloth-case, and therefore would not afford me so much room to carry on my work.

The second reason, however, which influenced my choice, was of more importance. I had already ascertained that another cloth-case stood on the top of this one, whereas the biscuit-box had bales of linen—both on the top, and at that end through which I should have to make way. Now, I was convinced that I could much more easily remove the pieces of cloth than the hard rolls of linen—indeed I was not certain that these could be stirred at all—and therefore it was that I made choice of the cloth-case.

Once inside it, you will suppose that I went immediately to work ; but no. I remained for a considerable time without moving either hand or arm. I was not idle, however, for all that, but busy with all the faculties of my mind in full action.

In fact, the plan I had just conceived, had awakened in me a sort of new energy ; and the hopes of safety

that now presented themselves were as strong, and stronger, than any I had entertained since the first hour of my captivity. The prospect, too, was far brighter. Even after my discovery of the butt of water and box of biscuits—even when I believed there would be a sufficient quantity of both to last out the voyage, there was still the long imprisonment before me—months of silent and wretched solitude to be endured.

Now it was different. In a few days, if fortune favoured me, I should once more gaze upon the bright sky—once more breathe the free air of heaven—once more look upon the faces of men, and listen to the sweetest of all sounds—the voices of my fellow-creatures.

I felt like one long lost in the desert, who beholds afar off upon the horizon some signs of the habitation of civilized men. Perhaps the dark outlines of trees—perhaps the blue smoke rising over some distant fire—but something that produces within him a hope that he will soon be restored to the association of his fellow-men.

Just such a hope had sprung up within me, every moment becoming stronger, till it amounted almost to a feeling of certainty.

It was perhaps this very confidence that kept me from rushing too hastily towards the execution of my plan. It was a matter of too much importance to be trifled with—an enterprise too grand either to be commenced or carried through in a reckless or hurried manner. Some unforeseen object might become an obstacle—some accident might arise, which would lead to failure and ruin.

To avoid all chances of this, therefore, I resolved to proceed with as much caution as I could command; and before making any commencement of the work designed, to consider it in all its bearings. For this purpose, I sat down within the cloth-case,

and yielded up my whole power of thought to an examination of my intended task.

One thing appeared very clear to me—that the task would be one of very considerable magnitude. As already stated, I knew that I was near the bottom of the hold ; and I was not ignorant of the great depth of the hold of a large ship. I remembered that in slipping down the rope-tackle, it was as much as I could do to hold on till I had reached the bottom ; and a glance upward after I had reached it, showed the hatchway a vast height above me. I reasoned, then, that if all that space was filled with merchandise quite up to the hatch—and no doubt it was—then I should have a long tunnel to make.

Besides, I should not only have to cut upwards, but also in a direction leading towards the hatchway—that is, nearly half across the breadth of the ship. This last did not trouble me so much ; for I was pretty sure I would not be able to go in a direct line, on account of the nature of the packages I should encounter. A bale of linen, for instance, or some like unwieldy substance, would have to be got round ; and, at each stage, I should have a choice either to proceed upward or in a horizontal direction—which-ever might appear the easiest.

In this way I should rise by steps, as it were, obliquing always in the direction of the hatchway.

Neither the number of the packages I might have to burrow through, nor the distance, troubled me so much as the materials which they might contain. It was this thought which gave me the most concern ; for the difficulty would be greater or less according to the materials I should have to remove out of my way. Should many of the articles prove to be of that kind, that, when taken out of the cases, would become more bulky, and could not be compressed again, then I should have to dread the ‘back-water’ ; and in reality this was one of the worst of my apprehensions.

I had experienced already what a misfortune it would be, since, but for the lucky circumstance of the brandy-cask, the plan I was now about to attempt would have been altogether impracticable.

Linen I dreaded more than any other material. It would be more difficult to get through, and when removed from its close-pressed bales, could not possibly be repacked in so small a space. I could only hope, therefore, that the cargo contained a very small quantity of this beautiful and useful fabric.

I thought over many things which might be comprised in that great wooden chamber. I even tried to remember what sort of a country Peru was, and what articles of commerce would be most likely to be carried there from England. But I could make very little of this train of reasoning, so ignorant was I of commercial geography. One thing was certain : it was what is called an 'assorted cargo', for such are the cargoes usually sent to the seaports of the Pacific. I might, therefore, expect to encounter a little of this, and a little of that—in short, everything produced in our great manufacturing cities.

After I had spent nearly half an hour in this sort of conjecturing. I began to perceive that it could serve no purpose. It would be only guesswork, at best, and it was evident I could not tell what quality of metal the mine contained, until I had first sunk my shaft.

The moment to commence that labour had arrived ; and, throwing reflection for the time behind me, I betook myself to the task.

CHAPTER LV

THE LUXURY OF STANDING ERECT

It will be remembered that in my former expedition into the two boxes of cloth—while in hopes of finding more biscuits, or something else that was eatable—I had ascertained the sort of packages that surrounded them, as well as those that were placed above. It will be remembered, also, that on that end of the first cloth-case which lay towards the hatchway I had found a bale of linen ; but on the top of the same case rested another of cloth, apparently similar to itself. Into this one on the top I had already effected an entrance ; and therefore I could now count upon having made so much way *upward*. By emptying the upper case of its contents, I should thus have gained one clear stage in the right direction ; and considering the time and trouble it took to hew my way through the side of one box, and then through the adjacent side of another, this portion of my work already accomplished was a matter of congratulation. I say already accomplished, for it only remained to drag down the pieces of cloth contained in the upper box, and stow them away to the rear.

To do this, then, was the first act of my new enterprise, and I proceeded to its execution without further delay.

After all, it did not prove a very easy task. I experienced the same difficulty as before, in detaching the pieces of cloth from one another, and drawing them forth from their tightly-fitting places. How-

ever, I succeeded in getting them clear ; and then taking them, one at a time, I carried, or rather pushed them before me, until I had got them to the very farthest corner of my quarters, by the end of the old brandy-cask. There I arranged them, not in any loose or negligent manner, but with the greatest precision and care ; packing them into the smallest bulk, and leaving no empty corners, between them and the timbers, big enough to have given room to a rat.

Not that I cared about rats sheltering themselves there. I no longer troubled my head about them ; and although I had reason to know that there were still some of them in the neighbourhood, my late sanguinary *razzia* among them had evidently rendered them afraid to come within reach of me. The terrible screeching which their companions had uttered, while I was pounding the life out of them, had rung loudly all through the hold of the ship, and had acted upon those of the survivors, that had heard it, as a salutary warning. No doubt they were greatly frightened by what they had heard ; and perceiving that I was a dangerous fellow-passenger, would be likely to give me a ' wide berth ' during the remainder of the voyage.

It was not any thought about the rats, then, that caused me to caulk up every corner so closely, but simply with the view of economizing space ; for, as I have already said, this was the point about which I had the greatest apprehensions.

Proceeding, then, in this vigorous but careful manner, I at length emptied the upper box, and finished by stowing away its contents behind me. I had managed the latter to my entire satisfaction, and I was under the belief that I had repacked the pieces of cloth in such a manner as to lose scarcely the bulk of one of them of my valuable space.

The result had an encouraging effect upon me, and

produced a cheerfulness of spirits to which I had long been a stranger. In this pleasant mood I mounted into the upper box—the one which I had just cleared—and after placing one of the loose boards across the bottom, which had been partially removed, I sat down upon it, leaving my legs to hang over into the empty space below. In this attitude, which was entirely new to me, and in which I had plenty of room to sit upright and at my ease, I found a new source of gratification. Confined so long within a chamber whose greatest height was little over three feet, while my own was four, I had been compelled to stoop in a crouching attitude whenever I attempted to stand; and I was even obliged to sit with my legs bent, and my knees on a level with my chin. These inconveniences are but slight, when one has only to suffer them for a short while; but under long endurance, they become irksome and even painful. It was, therefore, not only a release, but a great luxury to me, to find that I had room enough to sit upright, and with my legs at full stretch. Better still, I could also *stand* erect, for the two boxes now communicated with each other, and it was full six feet from the bottom of the one to the top of the other. Of course my own height being only four, left two feet of space between the crown of my head and the ceiling of my new apartment, which I could not even touch with the tips of my fingers.

Perceiving my advantages, I did not remain long seated. I had gone into the upper box, chiefly for the purpose of making a survey of its dimensions, and also to ascertain whether I had quite cleared out its contents; and then I had sat down as described. But I was not long in this attitude, when it occurred to me that I could enjoy a 'stand up' still better; and with this idea I slipped back again till my feet rested on the bottom of the lower case, while my head, neck, and shoulders remained within the com-

partment of the upper. This gave me an attitude perfectly erect, and I was not slow in perceiving that this was for me the true position of rest. Contrary to the usual habit of human bipeds, standing was to me easier than sitting ; but there was nothing odd about the thing, when it is remembered how many long days and nights I had spent either seated or on my knees ; and I now longed to assume that proud attitude which distinguishes mankind from the rest of creation. In truth, I felt it to be a positive luxury to be permitted once more to stand at full height ; and for a long while I remained in this attitude without moving a limb.

I was not idle, however. My mind was active as ever ; and the subject with which it was occupied was the direction in which I should next carry my tunnel—whether still upward, through the lid of the newly-emptied case, or whether through the end that lay toward the hatchway ? The choice lay between a *horizontal* and a *vertical* direction. There were reasons in favour of each—and reasons also that influenced me against one and the other—and to weigh these reasons, and finally determine upon which direction I should take, was a matter of so much importance that it was a good while before I could bring my plans to a satisfactory conclusion.

CHAPTER LVI

SHIP-SHAPE

THERE was one reason that would have influenced me to cut upward through the lid. It was, that by taking that direction, I should arrive the sooner at the top of all the packages ; and once there, I might find a vacant space between them and the timbers of the deck, through which I could crawl at once to the hatchway. This would give me less tunnelling to do, since the vertical line would be shorter than that passing diagonally to the hatch. In fact, every foot gained in a horizontal direction would appear to be no gain at all, since there would still be the same height to be reached vertically.

It was highly probable there was a space between the cargo and the under-side of the deck timbers ; and in the hope that this might be so, I made up my mind not to proceed in the horizontal direction unless when I should be forced out of the other by some obstacle that I could not remove. For all this, I resolved to make my first cut *horizontally* ; and three reasons guided me to this resolve. The first was, that the end-boards of the case appeared somewhat loose, as if they could be easily got out of the way. The second was, that in thrusting the blade of my knife through the slits of the lid, it touched against a soft but stiff substance, which had all the 'feel' of one of those dreaded packages which had hitherto proved so often an obstacle, and which I had already most bitterly anathematized.

I tried the slit in several places, and still touched what appeared to be a bale of linen. At the end of the case I made trial also, but there it was wood that resisted the point of my blade. It appeared to be deal, and the same as the other boxes were made of; but even had it proved to be timber of the hardest kind, it would be easier to cut a hole through it than through a bale of linen.

This reason would have been of itself sufficient to have influenced me to choose the horizontal direction; but there was still a third that offered itself to my view.

This third reason will not be so easily understood by those who are unacquainted with the interior of the hold of a ship, particularly such ships as were built in the time of which I am speaking, which you will remember was a great many years ago. In ships of the proper shape, such as the Americans have taught us to build, the reason I am about to give would not have any application.

But I shall enter into particulars, so that you may comprehend it; and, at the same time, in this trifling digression from the thread of my narrative, I hope, young friends, to teach you a lesson of political wisdom that may benefit both you and your country when you are old enough to practise it.

I hold the doctrine, or, I should rather say, I have long been aware of the fact (for there is no 'doctrine' about it), that the study which is usually styled POLITICAL SCIENCE, is the most important study that ever occupied the attention of men. It embraces and influences all other existences in the social world. Every art, science, or manufacture hinges upon this, and depends upon it for success or failure. Even morality itself is but a corollary of the political state, and crime a consequence of its bad organization. The political *status* of a country is the *main* cause of its happiness or its misery. In no case has govern-

ment reached anything approaching to justice ; hence, there is no people who ever has, as a whole, enjoyed ordinary happiness. Poverty, misery, crime, degradation, are the lot of the *majority* in every land, except one, and in that one there is yet nothing near perfection in government, only a step in advance.

As I have said, then, the *laws* of a country—in other words, its *political* condition—influence almost everything : the ship we set sail in, the carriage we ride in, the implements of our labour, the utensils we employ in our dwellings, even the comfort of our dwellings themselves. Nay more, and of still greater importance, they influence *ourselves*—the shape of our bodies, and the disposition of our souls. The dash of a despot's pen, or a foolish act passed in Parliament, which might appear to have no personal application to any one, may exert a secret and invisible influence, that, in one single generation, will make a whole people wicked in soul and ignoble in person.

I could prove what I state with the certainty of a geometric truth, but I have no time now. Enough if I give you an illustration. Hear it, then :—

Many years ago a law was passed in the British Parliament for the taxation of ships, for they, like everything else, must pay for their existence. There was a difficulty how to proportion this tax. It would scarcely be just to make the owner of a poor little schooner pay the enormous sum required from him who is the proprietor of a grand ship of two thousand tons. It would at once eat up the profits of the lesser craft, and *swamp* her altogether. How, then, was this difficulty to be got over ? A reasonable solution appeared. Tax each vessel in proportion to her tonnage.

The scheme was adopted ; but then another difficulty presented itself. How was this proportion to be obtained ? It was by *bulk* that the ships were to be taxed ; but tonnage is *weight*, not bulk. How, then,

was this new difficulty to be got over? Simply by taking some standard size as the weight of a ton, and then ascertaining how many of these *sizes* the vessel would contain. In fact, after all, it came to *measurement*, not weight.

Next came the idea as to how the measurement was to be made, so that it would exhibit the relative proportions of ships; and that was very fittingly done by ascertaining in each the length of keel, the breadth of beam, and the depth of the hold. These three, when multiplied together, will give relative sizes of ships, *if these ships be properly constructed*.

A law was thus obtained sufficiently just for taxation purposes, and you would think (if you are a superficial thinker) that this law could in no way exert any bad influence, except on those who had the tax to pay.

Not so; that simple, unsuspecting-looking law has caused more evil to the human race, more waste of time and loss of life, more consumption of human means, than would buy up at the present moment all the slavery existing in the world!

How has it done this? You will ask the question with surprise, I have no doubt.

Simply, then, by its not only having retarded the progress of improvement in ship-building—one of the most important arts in the possession of man—but actually by its having thrown the art *backward* by hundreds of years. And thus came the evil to pass: the owner—or he who was to be the owner—of a new ship, seeing no means of avoiding the heavy tax, was desirous of reducing it as much as possible, for dishonesty of this kind is the certain and natural result of over-taxation. He goes to the ship-builder; he orders him to build a vessel with such and such measurements of keel, beam and depth of hold—in other words, of such tonnage as will be required to pay a certain amount of tax. But he

does not stop there : he desires the builder, if possible, to make the vessel otherwise of such capacity that she will actually contain a third more of measured tonnage than that for which the tax is to be paid. This will lighten his tax upon the whole, and thus enable him to *cheat the government* that has put such a grievous impost upon his enterprise.

Is it possible to build a ship of the kind he requires ? Quite so ; and the ship-builder knows he can accomplish it by swelling out the vessel at the bows, and bellying her out at the sides, and broadening her at the stern, and altogether making her of such a ridiculous shape, that she will move slowly, and become the grave of many a hapless mariner. The ship-builder not only knows that this can be done ; but, complying with the wishes of the merchant-owner, he does it, and has done it for so long a period that he has grown to believe that this clumsy structure is the true shape of a ship, and would not, and could not, build any other. Nay, still more lamentable to state : this awkward form has so grown into his thoughts, and become part of his belief, that after the foolish law is repealed, it will take long, long years to eradicate the deception from his mind. In fact, a new generation of ship-builders will have to be waited for, before ships will appear of a proper and convenient form. Fortunately, that new generation has already sprung up beyond the Atlantic, and by their aid we shall get out of this hundred years' dilemma a little sooner. Even they have been half a century in arriving at what is yet far from perfection in the art ; but, unsaddled by the incubus of the tax, they have been looking at the fishes in the sea, and drawing a few ideas from the mechanism of nature ; and hence their present superiority.

Now you will better understand what I mean by the assertion that *political science is the most important study that can occupy the minds of men.*

CHAPTER LVII

A VERY GRAND OBSTACLE

THE good ship *Inca*, then, was like most others built to the merchants' order. She was 'pigeon-breasted', and bulged out along the sides in such a fashion, that her hold was far wider than her beam; and, looking up from the bottom of the hold, the sides appeared to curve towards each other, and converge over you like a roof. I knew that this was the shape of the *Inca*, for it was then the universal shape of merchant vessels, and I was somewhat used to noticing ships of all kinds that came into our bay.

I have said that, while trying through the slits of the top of the box with my knife, I felt something soft, which I took to be a bale of linen; but I had also noticed that it did not extend over the whole lid. On the contrary, there was about a foot at the end—that end contiguous to the ship's timbers—where I could feel nothing. There were two slits, and I had run my blade through each without touching any substance, either hard or soft. I concluded, therefore, that there was nothing there, and that about a foot of space behind the bale of linen was empty.

This was easily explained. The bale standing on the two large cloth-cases, was at that height where the side of the ship began to curve inwards; and as its top would lie in contact with the timbers higher up, the bottom angle would evidently be thrown out from them to the distance of a foot or so, thus leaving a

three-cornered space quite empty, being only large enough to hold small packages of goods.

I reasoned, therefore, that if I were to proceed vertically upward, I should soon come in contact with the side timbers of the ship, constantly curving inward as high as the deck itself, and that I should meet with many obstacles, such as small packages, which I knew would be more difficult to deal with than large cases and boxes. For this reason, then, but more for the others already assigned, I came to the determination to make my next move in a horizontal direction.

You will perhaps wonder that I should have taken so much pains to determine this point ; but when you reflect upon the time and labour which it required to cut through the side of a box, and then through the adjacent side of the next—in short, to make a ‘stage’ in advance—when you reflect that a *whole day* might be so occupied, you will then perceive how important it was not to act rashly, but, if possible, to proceed in the right direction.

After all, I was not quite so long in choosing which way to go, as I have here been in narrating my reflections about it. It only required a few minutes for me to make up my mind ; but I was so pleased at being once more on my legs, that I remained standing for nearly half an hour.

When sufficiently rested by this, I placed my arms inside the upper case ; and then, drawing myself up, prepared to go on with my work.

I experienced a thrill of joy as I found myself in this upper box. I was now in the *second tier* of the packages, and more than six feet from the bottom of the hold. I was full three feet higher than I had yet been ; three feet nearer to the deck and the sky—to my fellow-creatures—to liberty !

On minutely examining the end of the case through which I intended to make an aperture, I was further joyed to find that this part of my work would not be

difficult. One board was already loose—the looseness having been caused by my tearing out the large piece at the bottom. Moreover, the blade of my knife told me that the object that was beyond, did not stand close up to the case, but was several inches from it. In fact, I could only just reach it with the tip of the blade. This was a manifest advantage. I should be able, by a strong push or kick, to start the board outward, and then dispose of it on one side or the other between the two packages.

And this I finally succeeded in doing. Booted for the purpose, I laid myself back, and then commenced beating a tattoo with my heels.

In a short while the ‘scranching’ sound announced that the hoops and nails were giving way ; and after another kick or two the board flew out, and slipped down between the boxes quite out of my reach.

I was not slow in thrusting my hands through the aperture thus made, and endeavouring to ascertain what sort of an article was to come next ; but though I could feel a broad surface of rough plank, I was unable to make out what sort of a package it was.

I knocked out another piece from the end of the cloth-case, and then a third—which was all there was of it—so that I had now the whole end open before me.

This gave me a fine opportunity to explore beyond, and I continued my examination. To my surprise, I found that the broad surface of rough deal extended in every direction beyond my reach. It rose vertically, like a wall, not only covering the whole end of the cloth-case, but stretching beyond it, upward and on both sides—how far I could not tell, but so far that, after thrusting my arms up to the elbows, I could feel neither edge nor corner.

This, then, was certainly a case of different shape and size from any I had yet encountered ; but what kind of goods it contained, I had not the slightest idea. Cloth it was not likely to be, else it would have

resembled the other cases ; nor yet linen—and there was some gratification in knowing it could not be this.

In order to ascertain what it really was, I inserted my blade through the slits of the rough deal. I felt something like paper ; but I could perceive that this was only an outside covering, for immediately under it a hard substance resisted the point of my blade, almost as hard and smooth as marble. By pressing the knife forcibly, however, I could feel that it was not stone, but wood, some kind that was very hard, and that appeared to be polished finely on the surface. When I struck suddenly against it, it gave out an odd echo—a sort of ringing sound, or ‘twang’, but for all this, I could not imagine what it was.

There was no help for it but to cut into the case, and then perhaps I should become better acquainted with the contents.

I followed a plan I had tried already. I selected one of the boards, of which the great case was made, and with my knife cut it across the middle. It was nearly twelve inches in width, and the work occupied me for many long hours. My knife had become as ‘dull as a beetle’, and this added to the difficulty of the task.

The section was completed, at length ; and, laying aside the knife, I contrived to draw one end of the cut plank outwards. The space between the two cases gave me room to move the board upward and downward, till at length the nails at the end were twisted out, and the board fell down along with the others.

The second half was displaced in a similar manner ; and I had now made an opening in the great case, large enough to enable me to examine its contents.

There were sheets of paper spread over the surface of something hard and smooth. These I dragged outwards, and laid the surface bare ; and then I ran my fingers over it. I perceived that it was some kind of wood, but polished till it was as slippery as glass. It

felt to the touch just like the surface of a mahogany table ; and I might have mistaken it for one, but on rapping it with my knuckles, it gave forth that same ringing hollow sound I had already noticed. Striking it with still greater violence, I could hear a prolonged musical vibration, that reminded me of an Æolian harp.

But I had now become aware of the nature of this huge object. It was a *Pianoforte*. I had seen one like it before. One used to stand in the corner of our little parlour, upon which my mother often made most beautiful music. Yes, the object whose broad smooth surface now barred my way, was neither more nor less than a *Piano*.

CHAPTER LVIII

TURNING THE PIANO

It was with unpleasant feelings I arrived at this knowledge. Beyond doubt, the piano would be a difficult obstacle, if not a complete barrier, to my further progress in that direction. It was evidently one of the grandest of 'grand pianos', far larger than the one I remembered to have stood in my mother's cottage parlour. Its upper side, or table, was towards me, for it had been placed upon its edge; and I could tell by the echo given back to my blows that this table was a piece of mahogany of an inch or more in thickness. It appeared, moreover, to consist of one solid board, for I could feel no crack or joining over its whole extent; and to get through this board, therefore, a hole would have to be made by sheer cutting and carving.

With such a tool as I handled, to make a hole big enough to creep through, even had it been common deal, would have been a work of no ordinary magnitude; but through a solid plank of mahogany doubly hardened by a process of staining and polishing, was a task that appalled me.

Besides, even could I succeed in doing so—even could I cut through the table-top—which, though a severe and tedious labour, would not have been impossible—what then? There were all the inside works to be got out. I knew little of the arrangement of the interior. I only remembered having observed a great many pieces of black and white ivory; and vast numbers of strong wire strings. There were

shelves too, and pieces that ran lengthwise, and upright pieces, and then the pedals—all of which would be very difficult to detach from their places. Beyond these, again, there would be a bottom of hard mahogany, to say nothing of the case on the other side, and through these another aperture would have to be made to let me out.

Still, other difficulties stared me in the face. Even should I succeed in getting the works loose, and drawing them out, and disposing of them behind me, would I then find room enough within the shell of the instrument to enable me to cut through its opposite side and also the case, and, still more, to make an entrance into whatever case or box lay beyond? This was a doubtful point, though not very doubtful. It was rather too certain that I could not do so.

Still, I might work upwards once I had cleared out the shell; but the clearing out the shell was of itself the most doubtful point; for that I feared I should not be able to effect at all.

On the whole, the difficulty of this enterprise quite dismayed me; and the more I thought about it, the less inclination I felt to attempt it. After considering it in all its bearings, I abandoned the idea altogether; and instead of trying to make a *breach* through the great wall of mahogany, I resolved upon 'turning' it.

I was considerably chagrined at being forced into this resolution, the more so that I had lost half a day's labour in hewing through the outside case; and all this, as well as the opening of the end of the cloth-box, now counted for nothing. But it could not be helped. I had no time to spend in idle regrets; and, like a besieging general, I commenced a fresh *reconnaissance* of the ground, in order to discover what would be my best route to *outflank* the fortress.

I was still under the belief that it was a bale of linen that lay on the top, and this quite hindered me from

thinking of going upward. My attention was turned, therefore, to the right and the left.

I knew that by tunnelling either way I should gain no advantage. It would not bring me an inch nearer the desired goal ; and even after I should have made a stage in either direction, I should still be only in the 'second tier'. This was discouraging enough—more loss of labour and time—but I dreaded that horrid bale of linen !

One advantage I had gained by knocking out the whole end of the cloth-case. I have already said there was a space of several inches between it and the great *coffin* that contained the piano. Into this space I could insert my arm beyond the elbow, and ascertain something about the sort of goods that lay right and left of me.

I did so. I was able to perceive that on each side was a box or case—both of which, as near as I could guess, were similar to that in which I was—that is, both were cloth-cases. This would do well enough. I had now obtained such practice in breaking open these chests, and rifling them of their contents, that I considered it a mere bagatelle ; and I should not have desired anything better than that the cargo had consisted entirely of those goods, for which the West of England has long been so famous.

While groping along the sides of these cases, it occurred to me to raise my hand upward, and just ascertain how far the bale of linen projected over the empty cloth-case. To my astonishment it did not project at all ! I say to my astonishment, for those bales I had already examined were as near as possible of the same size as the cases of broadcloth ; and as this one wanted quite a foot of being 'flush' with the inner end of the case, I concluded I should find it that much over at the other end. But it was not—not an inch over ; and therefore, thought I, it must be a smaller package than the others.

While making this reflection something suggested that I should scrutinize the bale more closely. I did so, both with my fingers and the blade of my knife, and was now agreeably surprised to find that it was not a *bale* at all, but a wooden box. It was covered all over with a soft thick substance—a piece of rush matting—and this it was that had led to my mistake.

The possibility of tunnelling in a vertical direction was now apparent. I could easily hew off the rush matting and then deal with the box as I had done with the others.

Of course, I thought no longer of taking the round-about way by the right or the left ; but at once changed my intention, and determined to travel upward.

I need hardly describe how I made my entry into this mat-covered box. Suffice it to say, that I began by cutting one of the lid boards of the empty cloth-case, and then drawing it downwards till I pulled it out. The open space by the side of the ship proved an advantage to me while making the cross-section, as it allowed me to ply my blade freely through the planks.

Having succeeded with one board, I was enabled to detach another without any more hewing ; and this gave me enough space to work on the bottom of the covered case.

By dint of cutting and tearing I soon got the rushes out of the way, and then the wood was revealed to my touch ; and by this delicate sense I perceived that, like the others, it was a case of common deal.

I only rested a moment before beginning my attack upon it. As it lay twelve inches from the timbers of the ship, one of its angles was quite within my reach ; and on running my hand along it, I could feel the heads of the nails, that did not appear to be either numerous or very firmly driven. This gave me satisfaction, and still more was I rejoiced to find that there was no hoop-ing upon it. I should, perhaps, be enabled to prise off

one of the boards, and this would save me the long, wearisome task of cutting it crossways.

At the moment this appeared a fortunate circumstance, and I congratulated myself upon it. Alas ! it proved the cause of a sad misfortune, that in five minutes had plunged me once more into the deepest misery.

Half-a-dozen words will explain.

I had inserted the blade of my knife under the board, and was trying if it felt loose. Not that I believed I could prize it off with this ; but rather to ascertain what resistance there was, in order to look out for some more proper lever.

To my sorrow, I leant too heavily upon the piece of steel ; for a short, sharp crack, startling me worse than a shot would have done, announced that *the blade was broken !*

CHAPTER LIX

THE BROKEN BLADE

YES, the blade was broken quite through, and remained sticking between the pieces of wood. The haft came away in my hand ; and as I passed my thumb over the end of it, I could perceive that the blade had snapped off close to the end of the backspring, so that not even the tenth of an inch of it was left in the handle.

I cannot describe the chagrin which this incident caused me. I at once recognized it as a misfortune of the very gravest kind, for without the knife what could I do ?

Without it I was, as might be said, *unarmed and helpless*. I could make no further progress with my tunnel ; I should have to abandon the enterprise so lately conceived, and upon which I had built such hopes of success ; in other words, I might now renounce my design of proceeding farther, and resign myself to the miserable fate that once more stared me in the face.

There was something awful in this re-action of my spirits. It was painful in the extreme. The very suddenness of the change rendered the shock more acute. But the moment before, I was full of confidence, making fair progress in my enterprise, and cheered with partial success. This unexpected misfortune had interrupted all, and plunged me back again into the gloomy gulf of despair.

For a long while I remained wavering and undecided. I could not make up my mind to do anything. What

could I do ? I could not continue my work : I had no tool to work with !

My mind seemed to wander. Several times I passed my thumb along the handle of my knife, till it rested upon the short stump of the broken blade, or rather upon the neck, for the blade was all gone. I did this in a sort of mechanical way, to assure myself that it was really broken off ; for so sudden had been the misfortune, that I could yet hardly believe in its reality. In truth, it had quite bewildered my senses, and in this state they remained for several minutes.

When the first shock was over, my self-possession slowly and gradually returned. Assured at length of the sad reality, and knowing the worst, I began to reflect whether something might not still be done with the broken weapon.

The words of a great poet, which I had heard at school, came into my mind : ‘ *Men better do their broken weapons use, than their bare hands* ’ ; and the suggestion that this wise saying afforded, I now took to myself. It occurred to me, then, to examine the blade. The haft I held in my hand, but the blade still remained in the angle of the box, where it had broken off.

I drew it out, and passed my finger over it. It was still entire, and as much of a blade as ever ; but, alas ! without the handle, what use could I make of it ?

I grasped it round the thick end, and made trial whether I could still cut with it. It was some satisfaction to find that I could—a little. The blade was a good long one, and this was a fortunate circumstance. By wrapping a piece of rag around the thick end, I might yet make it available ; though, of course, any cutting I might hereafter do with it, would be a slow and painful operation.

The idea of setting the blade in the haft again was out of the question. It is true I entertained it at first, but I soon discovered a difficulty not to be got over ; and that was the removal of the backspring.

Could I only have got this out of the way, the haft would still have served for a handle. I could easily have inserted the broken end of the blade between the scales ; and as I had plenty of good string, I might have tied it firmly there. But I had nothing to draw the well-riveted nail, and the backspring resisted all my efforts to detach it.

The haft, therefore, was of no more use than an ordinary piece of stick—indeed, not so much, for just then it occurred to me that a piece of stick might serve my purpose better. Out of a proper piece, I might be able to make some sort of a handle that would serve to hold the blade, so that I might still cut with it.

The encouragement which this idea gave me, once more roused my mind to new activity, and I set to thinking how I might make a new haft for the broken blade.

Necessity sharpened my ingenuity ; and I was not long in conceiving my design, nor a great while either about the execution of it ; for in about an hour's time I held in my hand a knife with a complete handle. It was but a rude one at best ; but I felt satisfied it would serve my purpose nearly as well as that which I had lost ; and this belief once more restored me to confidence and cheerfulness.

The new haft I had made in the following fashion :—Having procured a piece of wood from one of the thick boards, I first whittled it to the proper shape and size. This I was enabled to do with the blade, which, although without a handle, served well enough for light work like that. I then contrived to make a cleft in the stick, to the depth of two inches from its end ; and into this cleft I inserted the broken end of the blade. To lap this tightly with a string, was my next idea ; but I perceived at once that this would not do. The string would be stretched by the action of the blade, and the latter would soon get loose. If the sharp edge only came against the twine, while the blade was

being worked backwards and forwards, it would instantly sever it, and then the blade would pull out, perhaps drop down among the boxes, and so get lost. Such an accident would be fatal to my prospects; and, if possible, I must not risk it.

What could I find that would fasten the blade more securely in the cleft? If I could have obtained a yard or two of wire, it would have been just the thing; but there was no wire near me. What! thought I, no wire near me? The piano! the strings! surely *they* are of wire?

Once more the piano became the object of my attention; and if I could at that moment have reached the inside of it, I should certainly have robbed it of one of its strings. But, then, to get at the string?—that was a difficulty I had not thought of, but which the next moment came up before me. Of course, with my knife in its present condition, to cut my way into the piano would be a sheer impossibility, and I was forced to abandon the idea.

But in that instant I thought of another expedient—I thought of the iron hooping, of which there was plenty within my reach. The very thing. A piece of this would serve my purpose equally as well as wire. It was thin and pliable, and one or two turns of it around the haft, by the neck of the blade, would hold the latter in its place admirably, and prevent it from budging either backwards or forwards. A string, lapped tightly over all, would keep the hoop from getting loose, and thus I should have a complete handle.

No sooner thought of than done. The piece of hoop was at once searched for and found. It was neatly wound round the neck of the blade and haft; and having been firmly tied with strong twine, I found myself once more in possession of a knife. The blade was of course much shorter than before, but I believed it would still be long enough for cutting through the

thickest planks I should encounter ; and with this belief I felt satisfied.

The different operations I have detailed must have occupied me for twenty hours at least. I was worn and wearied, and should have sought rest much sooner ; but after the breaking of the blade, I could not think of resting. It would have been of no use attempting to sleep : my misery would have kept me awake.

The new knife, however, had restored my confidence ; and I could no longer resist the desire to take that repose which, both in mind and body, I so much stood in need of.

I need hardly add that hunger compelled me to resort once more to my miserable larder ; but, strange as it may appear to you—and as it does now to me—I felt no hardship in the kind of diet ; but, on the contrary, ate my *rat-supper* with as much relish as I should now do the choicest of dishes !

CHAPTER LX

A TRIANGULAR CHAMBER

I PASSED the night—I should rather say the hours of rest—in my old apartment, behind the water-butt. Whether it was night or day, I no longer knew nor cared. On this occasion I slept well, and awoke refreshed and strengthened. My new diet, no doubt, aided in producing this effect ; for, however repugnant it might be to a dainty palate, it served well enough for a famished stomach.

I was not loath to make my breakfast upon it, which I did the moment after awaking ; and that finished, I again crawled back through my ‘ gallery ’, and entered the empty box, where I had already spent nearly the whole of a day and night.

As I climbed into the same place, I could not help thinking how little way I had made during my last spell of twenty hours ; but some secret thought inspired me with the hope, that on this occasion I should be more fortunate.

My intention was to continue the work which had been interrupted by the breaking of my knife. Before that unlucky accident befell me, I had noticed that the board was not very firmly nailed on. It could be started easily enough with a proper tool ; I fancied that even a good piece of stick would do it.

I was careful not to make any more rash experiments with the blade of my knife. Now, more than ever, did I value this precious weapon ; for I was fully sensible that my life depended on its endurance.

‘ If I only had a piece of some hard wood ! ’ thought I.

I remembered that in making an entrance into the brandy-cask I had cut large pieces from the oaken staves. Perhaps one of these would do ?

With the thought, I hurried back to the little chamber where I knew they were lying.

After removing some pieces of cloth, I found them ; and having groped among the cuttings, I possessed myself of a piece that appeared as if it would suit my purpose.

Getting back to the box, I even shaped out a little crowbar, by giving the stick a wedge end with my knife ; and this thin end I inserted under the plank, and drove it inward as far as I could, by striking it with a heavy piece of board.

It soon took hold ; and then grasping it by the end, and jerking it downwards, I had the gratification to hear the creaking of the nails as they started outward. My fingers now took the place of the little lever ; and the board came ‘ skreeking ’ out of the bottom of the box.

That contiguous to it was more easily detached ; and the two left me an aperture large enough to get out the contents, whatever they might be.

They were oblong packages, shaped like pieces of cloth or linen, but they felt lighter and more elastic than either. Better still, they could be pulled out more easily, and without the necessity of being taken out of their envelopes.

I had no curiosity to know what they were, since I could tell they were nothing eatable, and perhaps I should not have known till this day, but that in drawing out one more tightly wedged than the rest, its wrapper was torn off ; and as I passed my fingers between the folds of the soft light fabric, I guessed from their smooth silken surface that I was dealing with the finest of *velvet*.

The box was soon emptied, and its contents carefully

stowed in the most convenient space behind me ; and then, with a joyous heart, I mounted into the space I had cleared out. One more stage nearer to liberty !

I had been less than two hours in accomplishing this great advance. Such success was ominous of future good fortune. It was a day well begun ; and I resolved not to throw away a minute of time, since the fates appeared so propitious.

After going down to refresh myself with a grand draught of water, I returned to the *ci-devant* depository of the velvet, and there entered upon a new series of explorations. As in the case of the cloth-box, I saw that the end of this, which also abutted against the piano-forte, could be easily *kicked out* ; and without waiting to ascertain farther, I set my heels against it, and began playing my old *tattoo*.

This time I did not finish it so soon. I was pinched for want of room, the velvet-box being much smaller than that which contained the cloth ; but I effected my purpose at length, and out went the end-boards, one after another, dropping down into the interstices between the cases of goods.

Doubling myself over upon my knees, I leant forward to make a new *reconnaissance*. I expected, or rather dreaded, to find the great wall-like piano-case shutting up the whole space I had opened. Certainly, the huge case was there—for I at once laid my hand upon it—but I could scarce restrain an exclamation of joy, when I found that it extended scarce half-way across the opening ! What delighted me still further was, that, in groping around its edge, I observed that opposite the opening in that part to which the piano-case did not extend, there was a large space entirely empty—a space almost big enough to have contained another case of velvet !

This was a very joyful surprise, and I at once perceived the advantage thus thrown in my way. It was so much of my tunnel ready made to my hand.

On thrusting my arm outside the end of the box and upward, I became acquainted with a new source of joy. I perceived that the empty space continued for ten or twelve inches higher than the top of the box—in fact, to the top of the piano-case itself. It also opened about the same distance below where my knees rested. There I perceived that it ended in a sharp angle ; for I had already noticed that this little chamber was not of a *square* shape, as we say, but of the form of a triangle, with its apex pointing downwards. This was caused by the peculiar construction of the piano-case, which resembled a great parallelopipedon, with one corner sawed off. It was standing upon its larger end, and it was where this corner should have been that the place remained empty.

In all likelihood the triangular shape of this space rendered it inconvenient for any package which there was among the merchandise, and hence was it unoccupied.

So much the better for me, thought I, as I stretched forth my arms, and leant my body over into it, with the design of giving it a more thorough exploration.

CHAPTER LXI

A MILLINER'S BOX

I WAS not long about this business. I soon perceived that the back of the empty space was closed in by a large box, and a similar one blocked up the right side. The left was the diagonal edge of the case itself, about twenty inches or two feet in width.

But I troubled myself very little either about back, left, or right. It was the ceiling of the little chamber that had the greatest interest for me; for it was in that direction I intended, *if possible*, to continue my tunnel.

I knew that I was now far enough in the horizontal direction; for the chief advantage I had gained by the discovery of the empty space was, that it carried me the thickness of the piano-case—about two feet, as I have said—in this course, besides the distance that was open, upwards. Neither forward, then, nor to the right or left, did I wish to go, unless forced to do so by an obstacle. Upward was the echo of my thoughts. *Excelsior! excelsior!* Two or three stages more—perhaps less, if no obstacle intervened—and I might be free. My heart beat joyfully as the prospect passed before my mind.

It was not without a keen anxiety that I raised my hand to the ceiling of the empty chamber. My fingers trembled as they touched what I well knew to be canvas, and involuntarily they recoiled from it. O, mercy!—once more that hated fabric—a bale of linen!

I was not so sure of this however. I remembered

the mistake I had already made in this regard. I must examine farther.

I closed my fist, and gave the bottom of the package a smart rap with my knuckles. Ha ! it was a pleasant sound that answered to the blow. It was not a bale of linen, then, but a box, covered, like many others, with several folds of coarse cheap canvas. It could not be cloth, either ; for instead of the dull report which the cloth-boxes give out when struck, the one in question returned a hollow sound, precisely that of one that was empty !

This appeared strange enough. It could not be empty, else why was it there ? and yet if not empty, what did it contain ?

I hammered upon it with the haft of my knife—still the same hollow sound !

‘ Good ! ’ thought I. ‘ If empty, all the better ; but if not, surely there is something in it of a light nature—something that may be easily got rid of. Good ! ’

After making this reflection, I resolved to waste no more time in conjectures, but to satisfy myself of the contents of this new box, by making my way into it ; and in a trice I had ripped off the canvas that protected its bottom.

I found the position in which I stood inconvenient. The triangular space, narrowing acutely towards the bottom, hindered me from standing fairly on my feet ; but I soon remedied this defect, by filling the angle with some pieces of cloth and velvet that were near at hand. I then proceeded more comfortably with my work.

I need not detail the mode in which I burrowed through the bottom of the box. It was just as with the others, and succeeded as well. I had to make one cross-cut, and in this my newly-hafted blade behaved admirably ; after which, I pulled out the divided pieces.

I was not a little surprised when I arrived at the inside, and ascertained the contents of the box. It was some time before I could make them out by the 'feel', but when I had succeeded in getting one separated from its fellows, and ran my fingers over its outline, I at length recognized what they were. They were *bonnets*!

Yes, ladies' bonnets, and nothing but that—all apparently full 'trimmed', and garnished with their feathers, flowers, and ribbons.

Had I at that time possessed a more intimate knowledge of the costumes of the Peruvians, I should have been more surprised, perhaps, to find such an odd 'item' in the list of their imports. I should have known that such a thing as a bonnet is never seen upon the beautiful head of a Peruvian lady. But I knew nothing of this then, and I was only surprised by the oddity of such an article occurring in the cargo of a great ship.

The explanation was given me afterwards, thus :—that there were English and French ladies living in many of the South American cities—the wives and sisters of English and French merchants resident there, as well as of various representative officials—and that these, although so very far distant from their homes, still obstinately persisted in following the fashions of London and Paris, notwithstanding (it was added) the ridicule with which such an absurd head-dress was regarded by their fair sisters of Spanish America.

For these sojourners, then, the box of bonnets had been intended.

I am sorry to add that for that season their expectations must have been disappointed. The bonnets could never have reached them, or, if they did, it must have been in such a state as to render them unfit for any purpose of adornment. Mine was an unmerciful hand; for, once inside that box, it never ceased from wreck

and ruin till the whole of those beautiful ' ducks ' were crumpled up and stowed away in less than a tenth part of the valuable space they had hitherto occupied.

No doubt many an imprecation was afterwards heaped on my devoted head ; and the only apology I can make is to speak the simple truth—that with me it was a matter of life or death, and the bonnets had to go. It was not likely that this would be satisfactory in the quarter where the bonnets were expected. I never heard whether or no. I only know that I was enabled afterwards—but long afterwards—to satisfy my own conscience about the matter, by *paying the damage* claimed by the Transatlantic milliner.

CHAPTER LXII

HALF SUFFOCATED

HAVING disposed of the bonnets, my next step was to climb up into the empty box ; and, if possible, get the lid, or part of it, removed. But, first, I endeavoured to ascertain what was on the top of it, and for this purpose I adopted a plan that had already served me more than once—of feeling through the slits with the blade of my knife. Unfortunately, this was now shorter, and not so suitable for such a service, but it was still long enough to reach through a piece of inch plank, and two inches beyond, and this would no doubt enable me to determine whether the next obstacle to be encountered was a hard or a soft one.

Once within the bonnet-box, I stuck my blade up through the lid. The package above was composed of something soft and yielding. I remembered that there was a canvas cover, but I drove the blade in to its hilt, and still it encountered nothing like wood—nothing that resembled the boarding of a box.

But I was equally certain that it was not linen, for the blade penetrated as freely as it would have done into a mass of butter, and this would not have been the case had it been a bale of linen. Knowing it could not be this, my mind was easy. I would rather have had to deal with anything else.

I tried in several places—in fact, all over the top—and at every point I could bury my blade as far as the haft would let it go, with a very slight effort

used to push it in. Certainly the package consisted of some substance I had not before encountered, but as to what it was I could form no idea.

However, it did not feel as though it would present a serious obstacle to my progress; and under this pleasant impression, I went to work to undermine it, by taking a board out of the lid upon which it lay.

This, of course, required me to go through the tedious and painful process of making a cross-section with my knife—a kind of work that absorbed more of my time, and caused me more labour, than all the rest put together. But it was absolutely necessary, for there was no other plan by which I could tunnel through the tops of the boxes. On each rested the heavy weight of the packages above, and to start one of the planks, with this weight pressing down upon it, was impossible. It was only by cutting them across that they could be removed.

The lid of the bonnet-box did not prove so difficult to cut through. It was of thin deal, and in about a half or three quarters of an hour I had the middle piece of the three—for there were just three boards in it—cut into twain. The sections were easily bent downwards, and removed.

A patch of the canvas covering was then hacked off, and I could now get my hand upon the unknown package that was resting on the top. I recognized the object at once. I had been enough about my uncle's barn to know the feel of a sack. This, then, was a *sack*.

It was full of something: of what?—wheat, or barley, or oats? No, it was not grain—something softer and finer: was it a sack of meal?

I should soon ascertain that. My blade entered the sack, and a slit was cut large enough to admit my fist. I had no need to thrust my hand inside, for as I held it under the vent thus opened, I felt a

soft, powdery substance streaming downward, with which my palm was instantly filled; and as my fingers closed upon it, I felt satisfied that I had got hold of a fistful of flour. My hand went straight to my lips, and a single taste of the precious dust confirmed my conjecture. It was a sack of flour.

This was a joyous discovery. Here was food, and enough to last me for months! No more danger of starvation—no more rat diet. No. On flour and water I could live like a prince. What matter if it was raw? it was sweet, and palatable, and wholesome.

‘Heaven be praised! I am no longer in danger!’

Some such exclamation escaped me, as I arrived at a full appreciation of the importance of my new discovery.

I had now been at work for many hours, and once more needed rest. I was hungry, too, and could not resist the desire to make a grand meal on the new article of diet; and, filling my pockets with the flour, I prepared to return to my old lair behind the water-butt. I took the precaution to stanch the wound I had made in the flour-sack, by sticking a piece of loose canvas into the vent, and then I commenced my descent. The rats, bag and all, were chucked into the first convenient corner that offered, with the hope that no necessity would ever require me to draw them out again; and, then, having mixed me a large quantity of flour paste, I made as hearty a meal upon it as if it had been the nicest hasty *pudding* that ever was cooked.

A few hours of good sleep again refreshed me; and, on awaking, I ate another hasty meal of the paste, and after that commenced ascending my now greatly-extended gallery.

As I climbed through the second tier of boxes, I was surprised to feel on all sides of me a soft, powdery substance, resembling dust scattered over the boards

wherever they lay horizontally ; but on passing into the triangular space by the piano-case, I found the lower half of this cavity filled with the same dust, so that, as I stepped upon it, I sank up to the ankles. I perceived, moreover, that a shower of this soft substance was falling down upon my head and shoulders ; and, as I inadvertently turned my face upwards, it came rushing into my mouth and eyes, causing me to sneeze and cough in the most violent manner.

I felt for a moment as if I was in danger of being suffocated, and my first impulse was to beat a speedy retreat, and get back to the rear of the water-butt. But I had no need to go quite so far ; for on getting out to the old biscuit-box, I perceived that there the dust no longer reached me.

I was not long in arriving at an explanation of this singular phenomenon. It was the flour that was causing such a 'stoor'. The movement of the ship had shaken out the canvas rag with which I had stopped the vent, and the flour was escaping. No doubt this was the cause of the wastage.

The idea that all the flour would be lost rushed into my mind, and, as a consequence, that I should once more be forced to return to the rat diet. It would be necessary, therefore, to ascend to the sack, and stop the wastage at once.

Notwithstanding some apprehensions I had on the score of suffocation, I perceived the necessity of action ; and closing both mouth and eyes, I scrambled as fast as I could towards the empty bonnet-box.

I felt flour lodged on all sides as I went up, but I fancied it was no longer showering downwards. This was in reality the fact ; for on reaching the bonnet-box, I found that it had ceased to run out of the sack, and for the best of reasons—it was now all out of it. The sack was empty !

Perhaps I should have regarded this as a greater misfortune, but I saw that the flour was not all lost.

A good deal, no doubt, had filtered through the crevices, and got down to the bottom of the hold ; but a large quantity—as much as I would be likely to need—had lodged upon the pieces of cloth that I had placed in the bottom of the triangular cavity, and also in other places where I could get at it whenever I wanted.

It mattered little, however ; for in another moment I had made a discovery that drove all thoughts of the flour out of my head, and rendered any calculation about my future provision—either of food or water—a subject of the most trifling importance.

I had stretched up my hand to ascertain if the sack was quite empty. It appeared so. Why, then, should I not pull it through the aperture, and get it out of the way ? No reason why I should not ; and I at once dragged it down, and flung it behind me.

I then raised my head through the end of the box into the space where the sack had lain.

Merciful heavens ! What did I behold ? *Light ! light ! light !*

CHAPTER LXIII

LIGHT AND LIFE

YES, my eyes were once more cheered with heavenly light, producing within my heart a joy sudden and complete. I could not describe the happiness I felt. Every fear at once forsook me. I had no longer the slightest apprehension. I was saved!

The light I saw was but a very slender beam—a mere ray—that appeared to penetrate through a crack between two planks. It was above me, not vertically above me, but rather in a diagonal line, and apparently about eight or ten feet distant.

I knew it could not be through the deck that the light came. There are no open spaces between the planks of a ship's deck. It must be through the hatchway; and very likely the crack I saw was through the boarding of the hatch, at a place where the tarpaulin might be off or torn.

While gazing on this tiny beam, shining like a meteor above me, I thought it the loveliest object I had ever looked upon. No star in the blue sky had ever appeared to me half so brilliant or beautiful; it was like the eye of some good angel smiling upon me, and bidding me welcome again to the world of life.

I did not remain long in my position within the bonnet-box. I believed myself near the end of my labour, and the accomplishment of my hopes, and had no inclination to pause upon the threshold of deliverance. The nearer to the goal, the more earnest

had I become to reach it ; and therefore, without further hesitation, I set about widening the aperture already made in the lid of the box.

The fact of my seeing the light had convinced me of one important truth, and that was that I had reached the top of the cargo. Since it appeared in a diagonal direction, there could be no boxes or other packages intervening between it and my eyes, and, therefore, the space was empty. This emptiness could only be above the cargo.

But the matter was soon set at rest. It did not take me twenty minutes to widen a hole big enough to pass my body ; and, scarcely waiting to make this of sufficient size, I squeezed myself through, and wriggled out on to the top of the box.

I lifted my arms over my head, and extended them all around me. Only behind could I perceive anything—and there I could feel boxes, and bales, and sacks piled up still higher—but in front there was nothing but empty air.

I remained for some moments seated on the lid of the box, where I had climbed out, with my legs hanging down outside of it. I was cautious not to step off, lest I might fall into some great cavity. I remained gazing upon the beautiful beacon that was now shining still nearer to my face.

Gradually my eyes became accustomed to the light ; and, though the chink admitted only a few slender rays, I began to perceive the forms of objects that were near. I soon made out that the empty space did not extend far. It was a little pit, of an irregular, circular form—a sort of amphitheatre, shut in on all sides by the huge packages of merchandise that were piled around it. It was, in fact, a space that had been left under the hatchway, after the cargo had been all stowed ; and a number of loose barrels and bags that were strewn over it appeared to contain provisions—no doubt stores for the crew—

thus placed so that they could be readily reached when wanted.

It was on one side of this little amphitheatre I had emerged from my gallery ; and no doubt I was just under the edge of the hatchway. It only needed to advance a pace or two, knock upon the boards over my head, and summon the crew to my assistance.

But although a single blow, and a single cry, were all that were needed to procure my liberation, it was a long while before I could muster the resolution to strike that blow, or utter that cry !

I need not give you the reasons of my reluctance and hesitation. Think only of what was behind me—of the damage and ruin I had caused to the cargo—a damage amounting perhaps to hundreds of pounds—think of the impossibility of my being able to make the slightest restitution or payment—think of this, and you will comprehend why I paused so long, seated upon the edge of the bonnet-box. An awful dread was upon me. I dreaded the *denouement* of this *dark* drama ; and no wonder I hesitated to bring it to its ending.

How could I ever face the stern wrath of the captain ?—the brutal anger of that savage mate ? How could I endure their looks—their words, their oaths, and, likely enough, their blows ? Perhaps they would *pitch me into the sea* ?

A thrill of terror ran through my veins, as I dwelt on the probability of such a fate. A sudden change had passed over my spirits. But the moment before that twinkling ray had filled my bosom with joy ; and now, as I sat and gazed upon it, my heart was throbbing with fear and dismay !

CHAPTER LXIV

AN ASTONISHED CREW

I TRIED to think of some way by which I might be enabled to make reparation for the loss ; but my reflections were only foolish, as they were bitter. I owned nothing in the world that I knew of—nothing but my old watch—and that—ha ! ha ! ha !—would scarce have paid for the box of crackers !

Yes, there was something else that belonged to me—and does still (for I have kept it till this hour)—something which I esteemed far more than the watch—ay, far more than I would a thousand watches ; but that something, although so highly prized by me, would not have been valued at a single sixpence. You guess of what I am speaking ? You guess, and rightly, that I mean that *dear old knife* !

Of course, my uncle would do nothing in the matter. He had no interest in me farther than to give me a home, and that was a thing of choice rather than responsibility. He was in no way bound to make good my damages ; and, indeed, I did not permit myself for a moment to entertain the idea.

There was but one thought that held out to me the slightest hope—one course that appeared to be tolerably rational. It was this : I could bind myself to the captain for a long period. I could toil for him as a boy-sailor—a cabin-boy—a servant—anything that would enable me to work off my debt.

If he would only accept me for this purpose (and what else could he now do, unless, indeed, he really

did toss me overboard ?), then all might yet be right.

The thought cheered me ; and I resolved, as soon as I should reach the captain's presence, to make the proposal.

Just at that moment I heard a loud stamping noise above me. It was a continued series of thumps, that resembled the heavy footsteps of men passing backward and forward over the decks. They were on both sides of the hatchway, and all around it, upon the deck.

Then I heard voices—human voices. Oh, how pleasant to my ears ! First, I heard shouts and short speeches, and then all of them mingling together in a chant or chorus. Rude it may have been, but during all my life never heard I sounds that appeared to me so musical or harmonious as that work-song of the sailors.

It inspired me with confidence and boldness. I could endure my captivity no longer ; and the instant the chorus ended, I sprang forward under the hatch, and with the wooden handle of my knife knocked loudly upon the planks overhead.

I listened. My knocking had been heard. There was a parley among the voices above, and I could distinguish exclamations of surprise ; but although the talking continued, and even a greater number of voices appeared to take part in it, no attempt was made to take up the hatch.

I repeated my knocking louder than before ; and added to it the summons of my voice ; but I could myself perceive that my voice was tiny and feeble as that of an infant, and I doubted whether it could have been heard.

Again I listened to a volley of loud exclamations that betokened surprise ; and from the multitude of voices I could guess that the whole crew was around the hatchway.

I knocked a third time, to make sure ; and then

I stood a little to one side, in anxious and silent expectation.

Presently I heard something rubbing over the hatches. It was the tarpaulin being removed ; and, as soon as this covering was taken off, I perceived that light shot in through several chinks at the joining of the planks.

But the next moment the sky suddenly opened above me ; and the flood of light that poured down upon my face, rendered me quite blind. It did more—it caused me to faint and fall backward against the boxes. I did not lose consciousness all at once, but swooned gradually away under a feeling of strange bewilderment.

Just as the hatch was lifted upwards, I noticed a ring of rough heads—human heads and faces—above the edge, all around the great opening, and I observed that all of them were drawn suddenly back with an expression of extreme terror. I heard cries and exclamations that betokened the same ; but the shouts gradually died upon my ears, and the light dimmed and darkened in my eyes, as I lapsed into a state of unconsciousness, as complete as if I had been dead.

Of course, I had only swooned ; and was insensible to what was passing around me. I did not see the rough heads as they reappeared over the edge of the hatch frame, and again reconnoitre me with looks of alarm. I did not see that one of them at length took courage, and leaped down upon the top of the cargo, followed by another and then another, until several stood bending over me, uttering a volley of conjectures and exclamatory phrases. I did not feel them as they tenderly raised me in their arms, and kindly felt my pulse, and placed their huge rough hands over my heart to see whether it was still beating with life—no more did I feel the big sailor who lifted me up against his breast and held me there, and then, after a short ladder had been obtained and placed

in the hatchway, carried me up out of the hold and laid me carefully on the quarter-deck : I heard nothing, I saw nothing, I felt nothing, till a shock, as if of cold water dashed in my face, once more aroused me from my trance, and told me that I still lived.

CHAPTER LXV

THE DENOUEMENT

WHEN I came to my senses again, I saw that I was lying upon the deck. A crowd was gathered around, and look in what direction I might, my eyes rested upon faces. They were rude faces, but I noticed no unkindly expression in any one of them. On the contrary, I perceived looks of pity, and heard words of sympathy.

They were the sailors—the whole crew was around me. One was bending over my face, pouring water into my lips, and cooling my temples with a wet cloth. I knew this man at the first glance. It was Waters—he who had carried me ashore, and presented me with my precious knife. Little knowledge could he have at the time of the great service it was to do—and had since done—me.

‘Waters’, said I, ‘do you remember me?’

He started at my words, uttering, as he did so, a sailor’s exclamation of surprise.

‘Shiver my timbers!’ was the phrase. ‘Shiver my timbers! if ’tain’t the little marlin-spike as boarded us a-port!’

‘Him as wanted to go a seelarin?’ cried several in a breath.

‘The same, for sartin’.

‘Yes’, I answered, ‘it is; I am the same’.

Another volley of ejaculations followed, and then there was a momentary silence.

‘Where is the captain?’ I asked. ‘Waters, will you take me to the captain?’

‘ You wish to see the capten ? he’s here, my lad ’. answered the big sailor, in a kind tone ; and then, stretching out his arm, he made an opening in the ring that encircled me.

I glanced through this opening. I saw the same well-dressed man whom I had before recognized as the captain. He was only a few yards off, standing in front of the door of his cabin. I looked in his face. The expression was stern, but yet it did not awe me. I fancied it was a look that would relent.

I hesitated for a moment what course to pursue, and then, summoning all my energy, I rose to my feet, tottered forward, and knelt down before him.

‘ Oh, sir ! ’ I cried, ‘ you can never forgive me ! ’

That, or something like it, I said. They were all the words I could utter.

I no longer looked him in the face. With my eyes fixed upon the deck, I awaited his reply.

‘ Come, my lad ! rise up ! ’ said a voice, in a tone of kindness ; ‘ rise up, and come with me into the cabin ’.

A hand was placed upon mine, I was raised to my feet, and led away. He who walked by my side, and conducted me as I tottered along, was the captain himself ! This did not look like giving me to the sharks. Was it possible that the ending should be of this merciful complexion ?

As I passed into the cabin, I beheld my shadow in a mirror. I should not have known myself. My whole body was as white as if it had been limewashed ; but I remembered the flour. My face alone was to be seen, and that was almost as white as the rest—white, and wan, and bony as that of a skeleton ! I saw that suffering and meagre fare had made sad havoc with my flesh.

The captain seated me on a sofa, and, having summoned his steward, ordered him to fill me out a glass of port wine. He uttered not a word till I had

drunk it ; and then, turning to me, with a look in which I could read nothing of sternness, he said—

‘ Now, my lad, tell me all about it ! ’

It was a long story, but I told it from first to last. I concealed nothing—neither of the motives that had led me to run away from my home, nor yet any item of the vast damage I had done to the cargo. This, however, was already well known to him, as half the crew had long since visited my lair behind the water-butt, and ascertained everything.

When I had gone through every circumstance, I wound up with the proposal I had resolved to make to him ; and then, with an anxious heart, I awaited his response. My anxiety was soon at an end.

‘ Brave lad ! ’ he exclaimed, rising to his feet, and going towards the door, ‘ you wish to be a sailor ? You *deserve* to be a sailor ; and by the memory of your noble father, whom I chanced to know, you *shall* be a sailor ! ’

‘ Here, Waters ! ’ he continued, calling to the big tar, who was waiting outside, ‘ take this youngster, have him fresh rigged ; and, as soon as he is strong enough, see that he be properly taught the ropes ’.

And Waters did see that I was taught the ropes—every one of them, and in the proper manner. For many years afterwards he was my shipmate, under that same kind-hearted captain, until I rose from the condition of a mere ‘ boy tar ’, and was rated upon the *Inca’s* books as an ‘ able seaman ’.

But my promotion did not end there. ‘ *Excelsior* ’ was my motto ; and, assisted by the generous captain, I soon after became a third mate, and afterwards a second mate, and, still later, a first mate, and, last of all, a *captain* !

In course of time, too—still better than all—I became *captain of my own ship*.

That was the crowning ambition of my life ; for

then I was free to go and come as I pleased, and plough the great ocean in any direction, and trade with whatever part of the world I might think proper.

One of my very first and most successful voyages—I mean in my own ship—was to Peru; and I remember well that I carried out a box of bonnets for the English and French ladies resident at Callao and Lima. But these arrived safe, and no doubt disgusted the eyes of the fair Creoles, who were expected to admire them!

The crumpled bonnets had been long ago paid for; so, too, the spilt brandy and the damage done to the cloth and velvet. After all, it did not amount to such a vast sum; and the owners, who were all generous men, taking the circumstances into account, dealt leniently with the captain, who, in his turn, made the terms easy for me. In a few years I had settled for all, or, as we say in sailor language, ‘squared the yards’.

And now, my young friends! I have only to add, that having sailed the seas for many long years, and by careful mercantile speculations, and a fair economy, having acquired sufficient means to keep me for the remainder of my days, I began to grow tired of wave and storm, and to long for a calmer and quieter life upon land. This feeling grew upon me, every year becoming stronger and stronger; till at last, unable to resist it any longer, I resolved to yield to its influence, and anchor myself somewhere upon shore.

For this purpose, then, I sold off my ship and sea stores, and returned once more to this pretty village, where I have already told you I was born, and where I have also made known to you, that *it is my intention to die!*

And now, good-day! and God bless you all!

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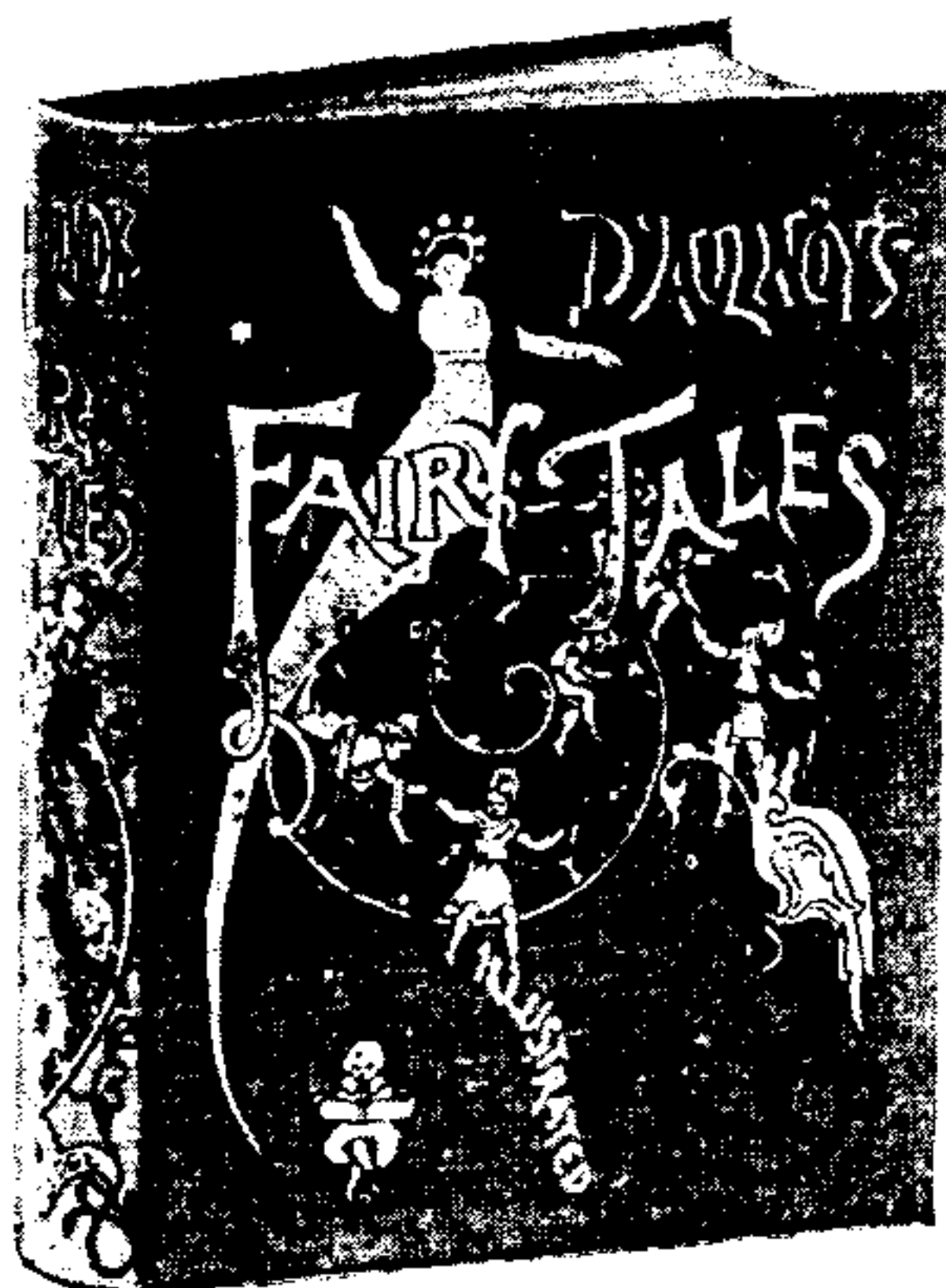
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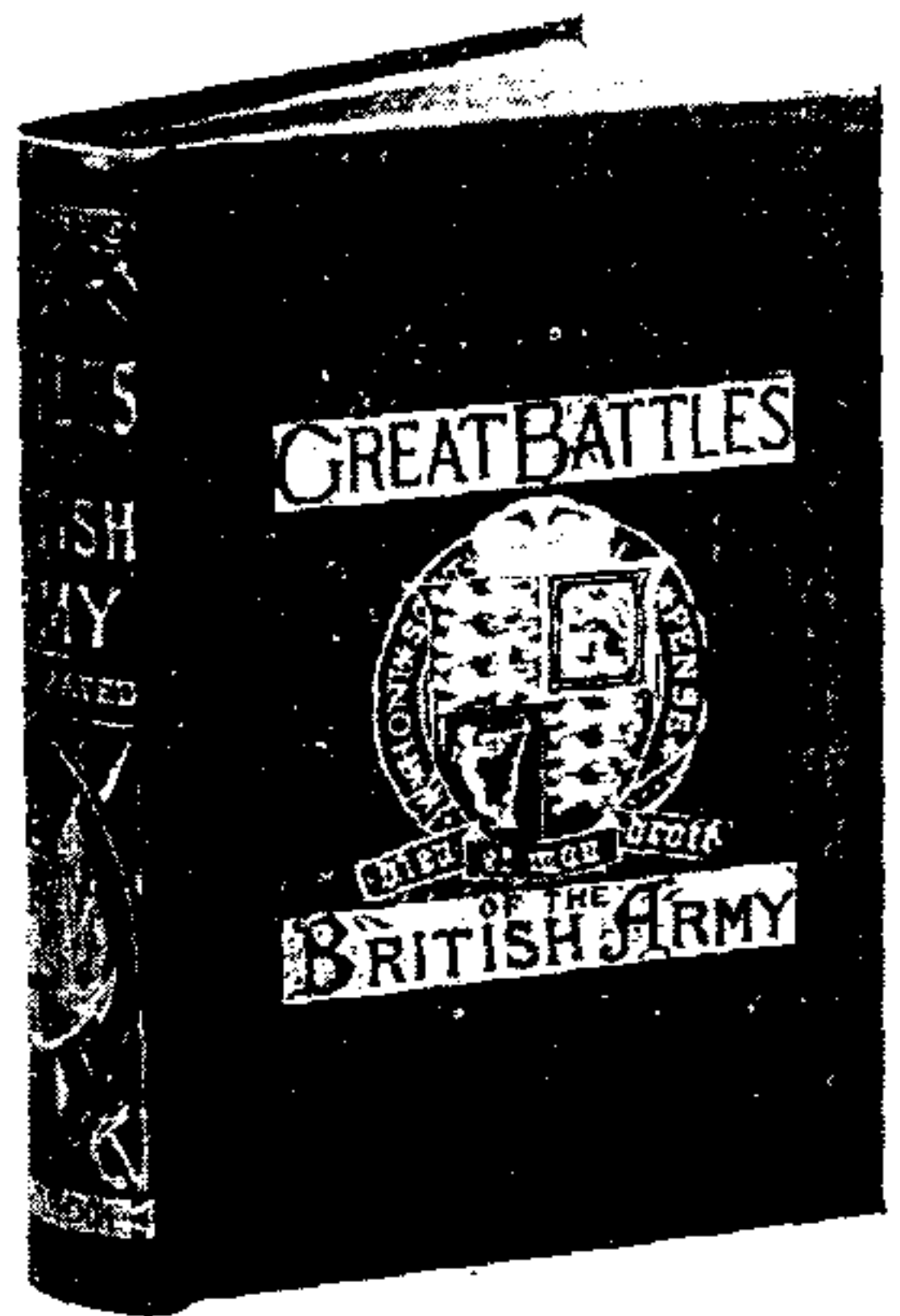
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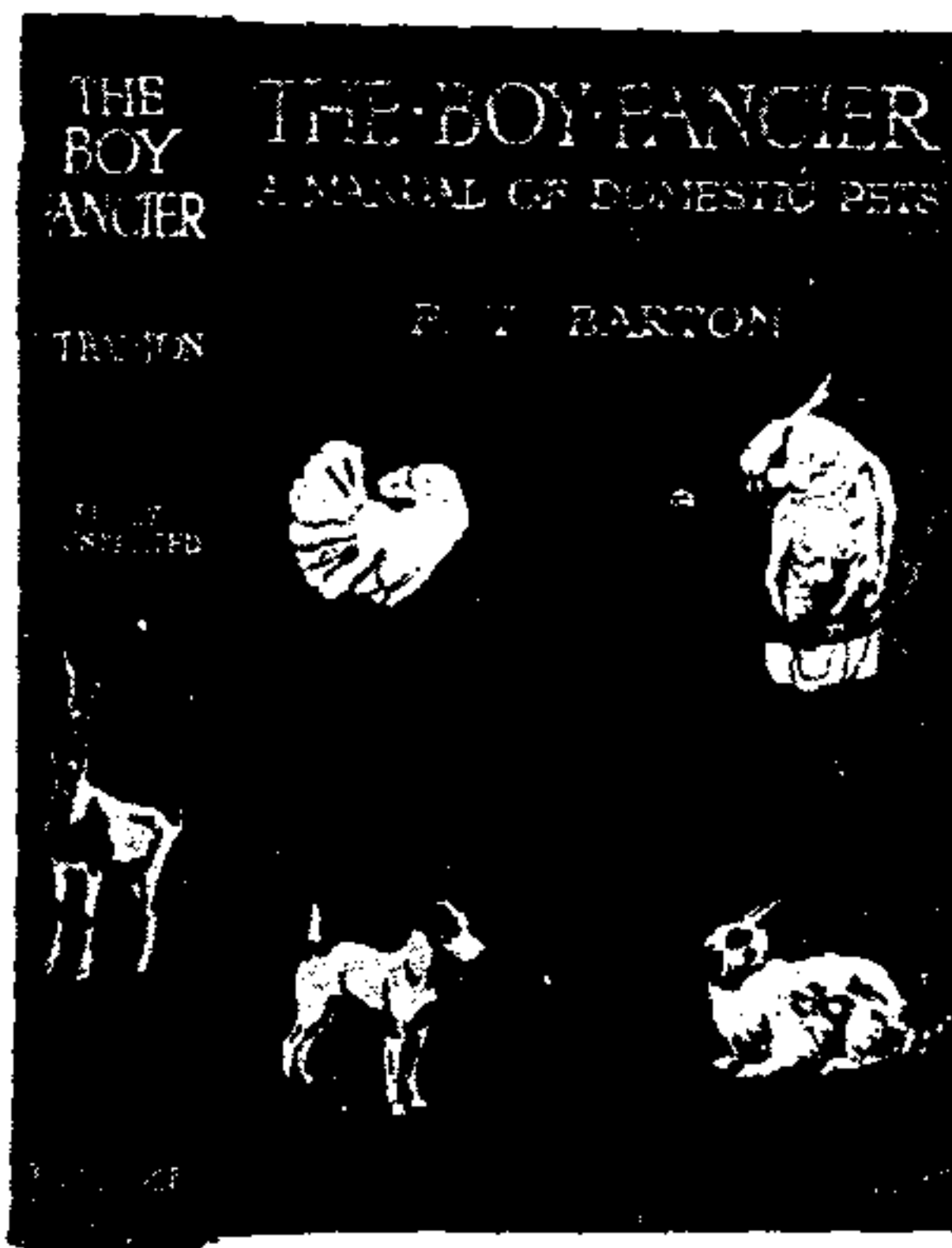
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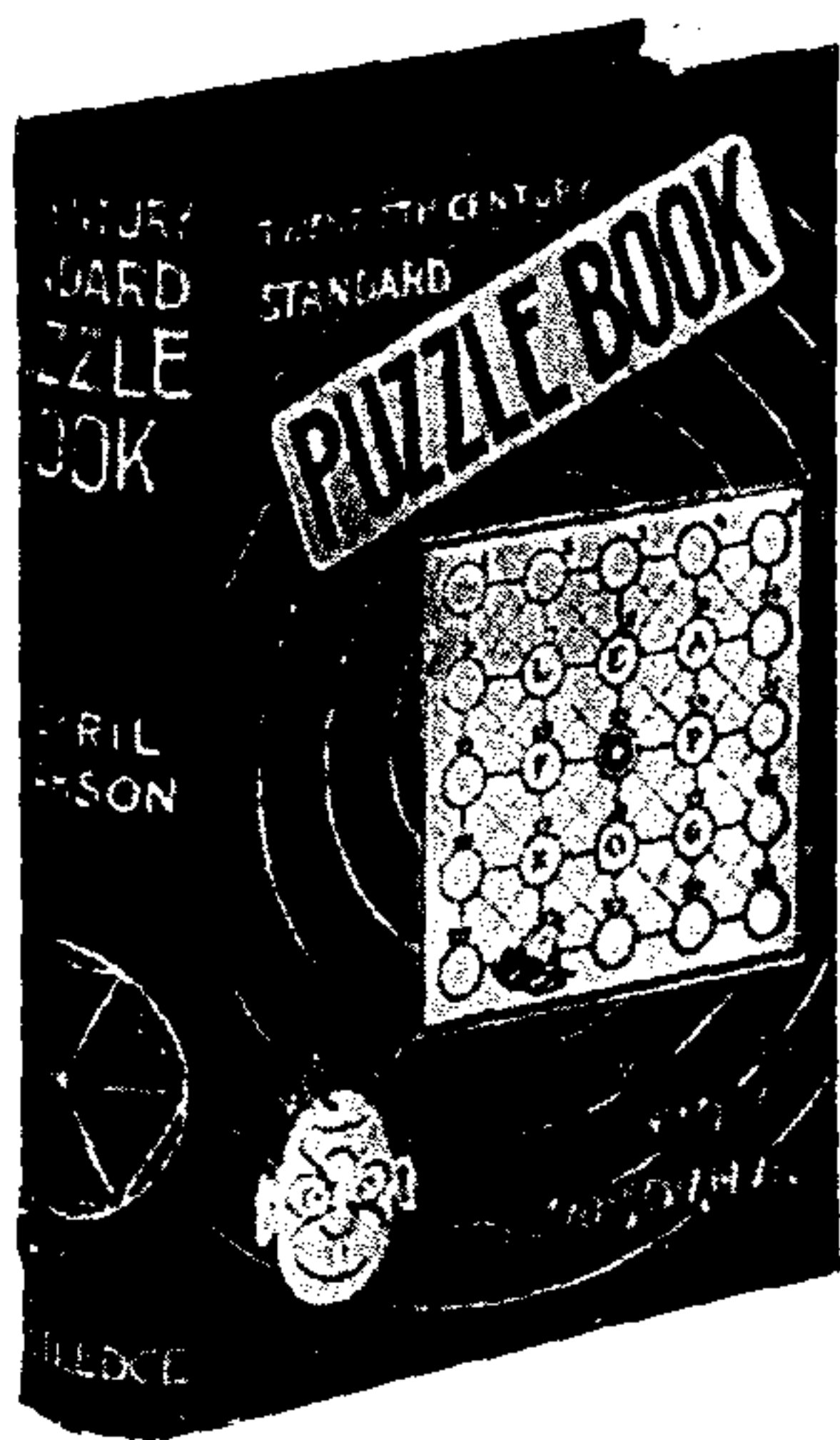
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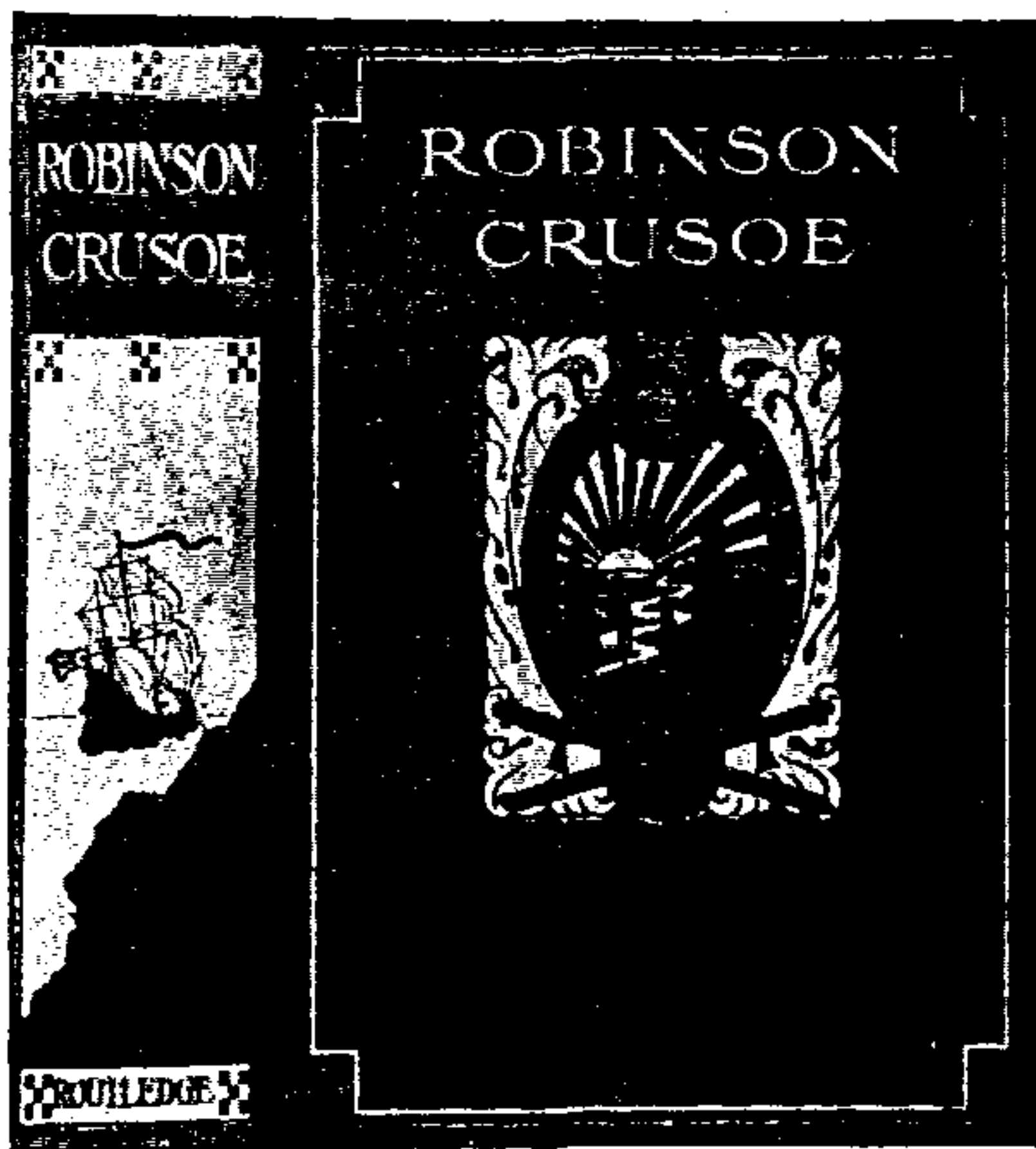
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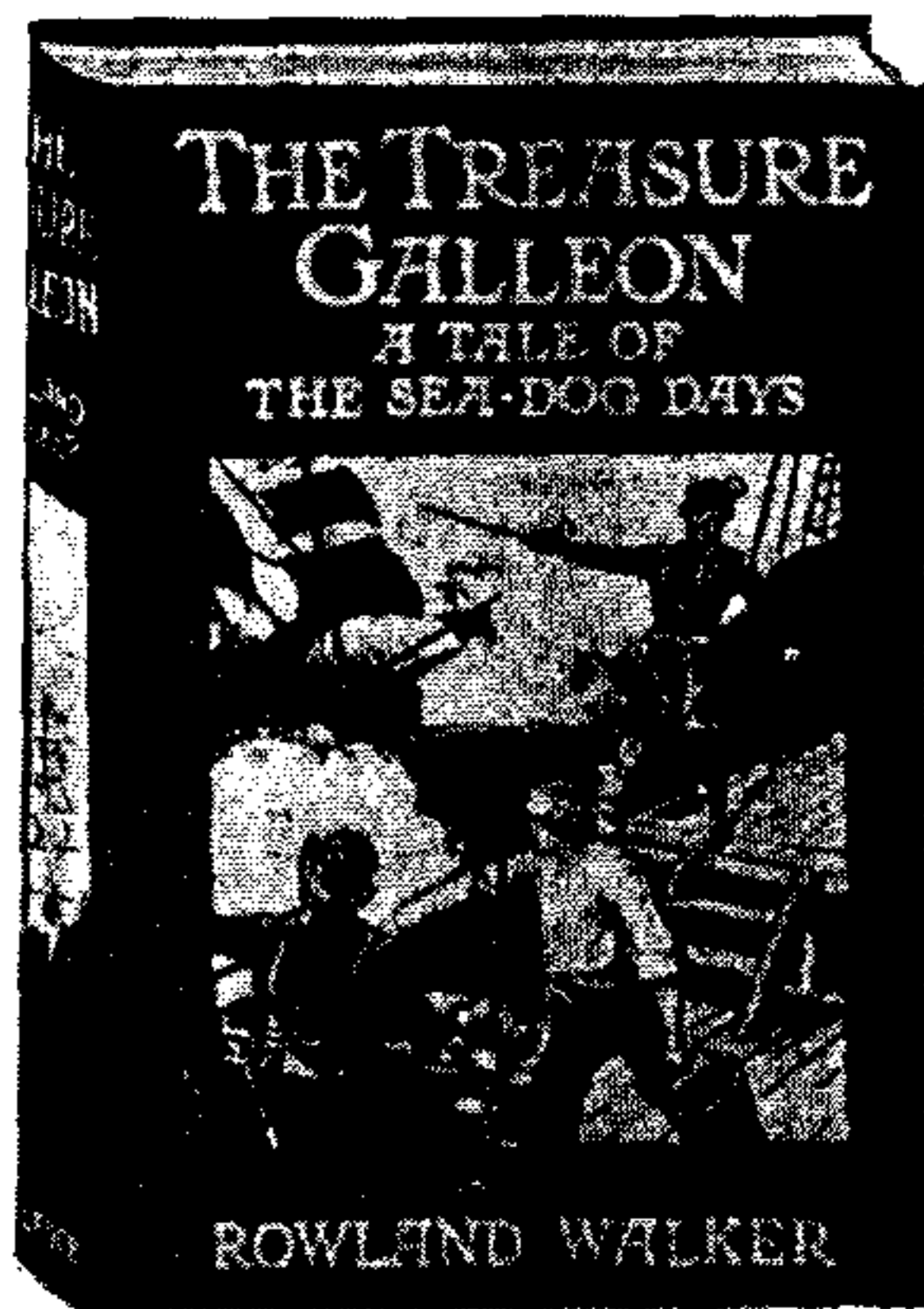
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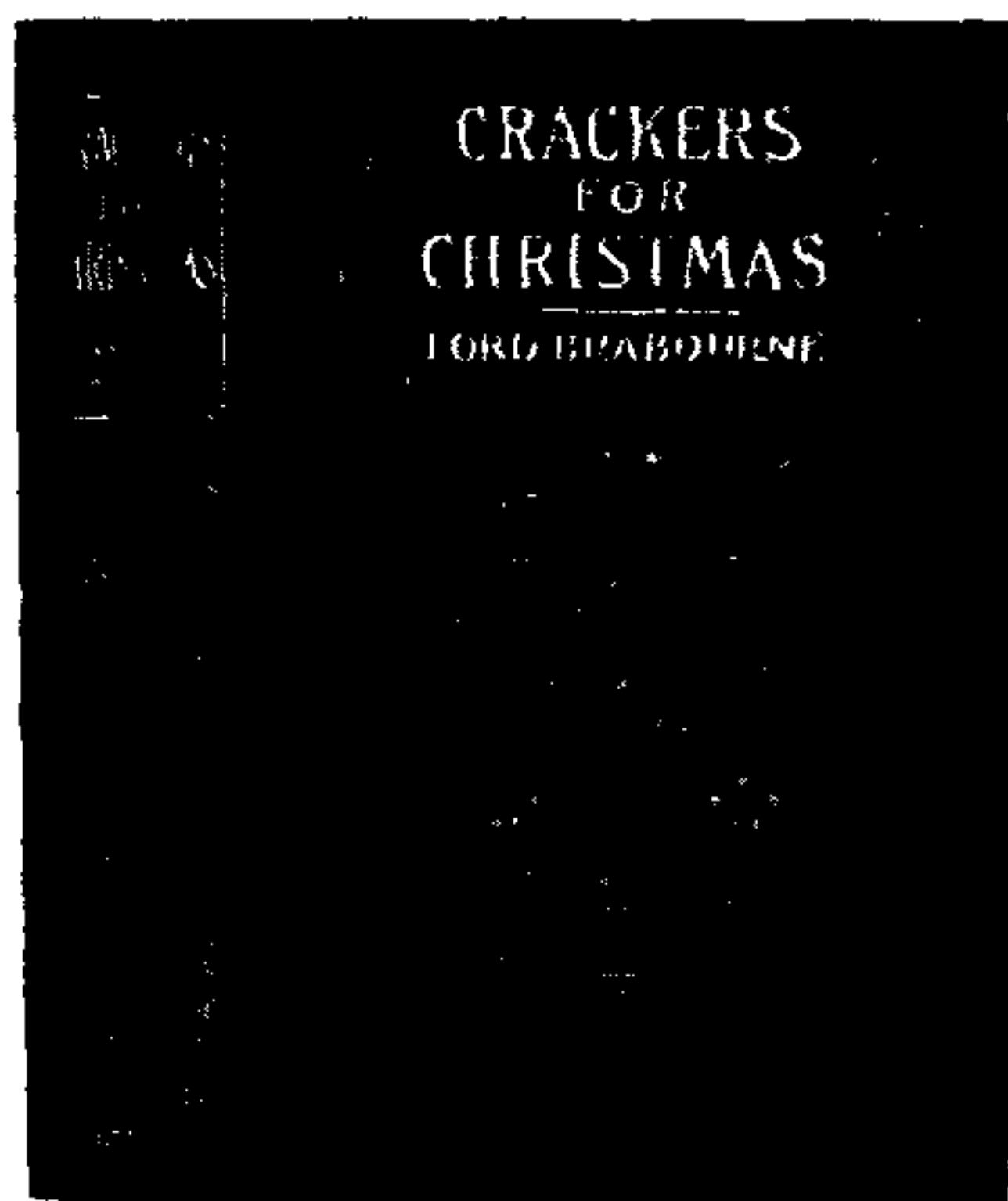
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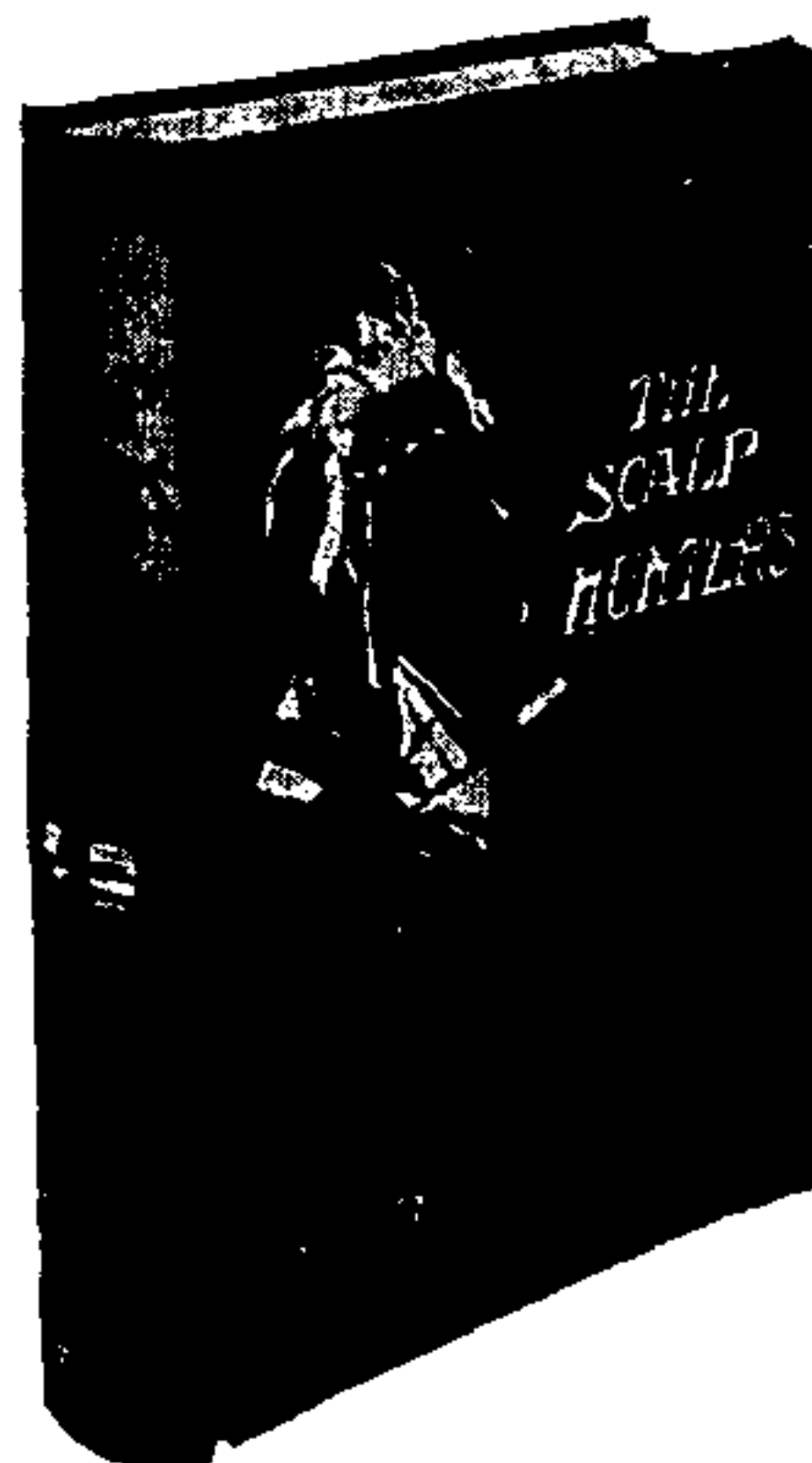
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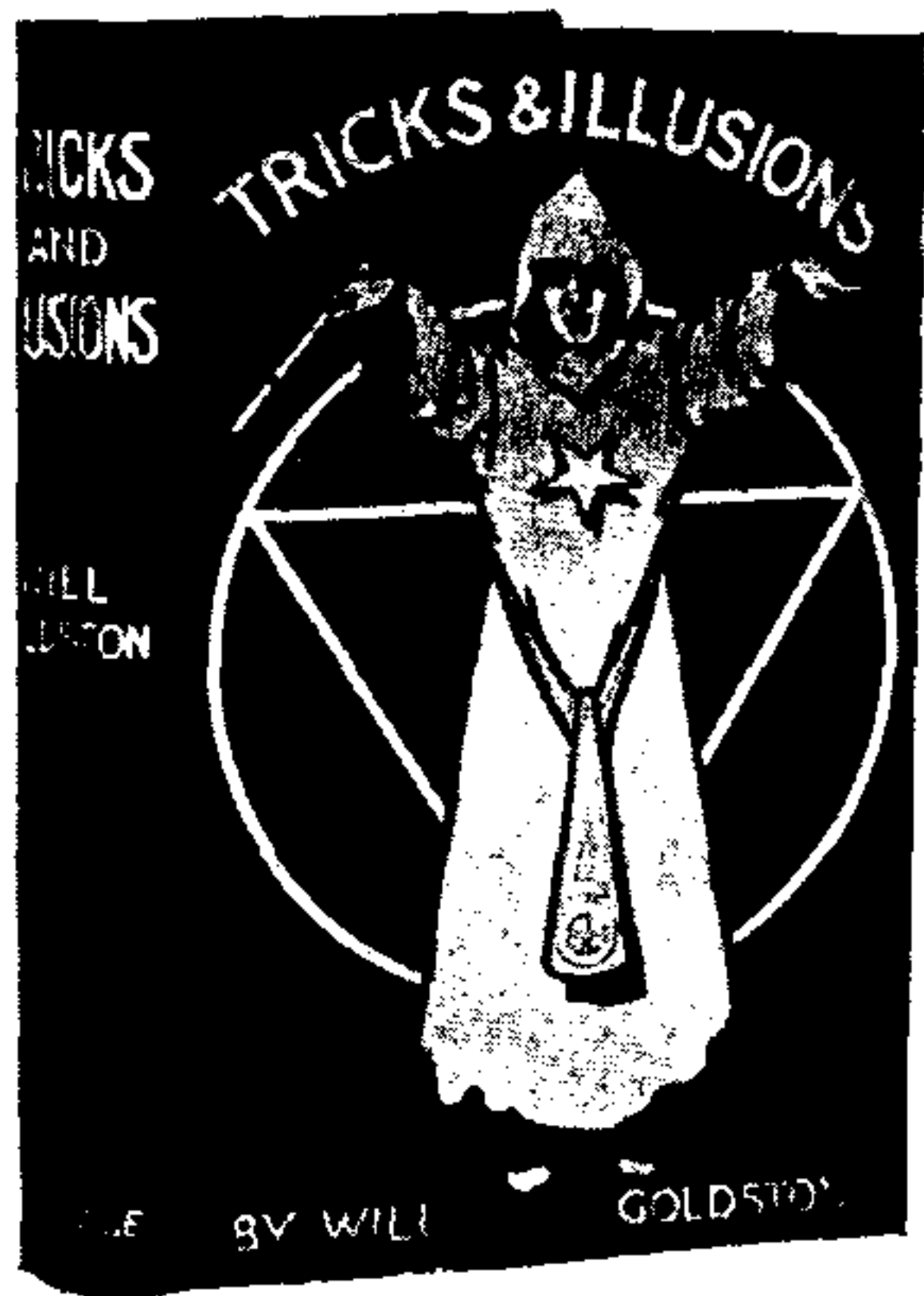
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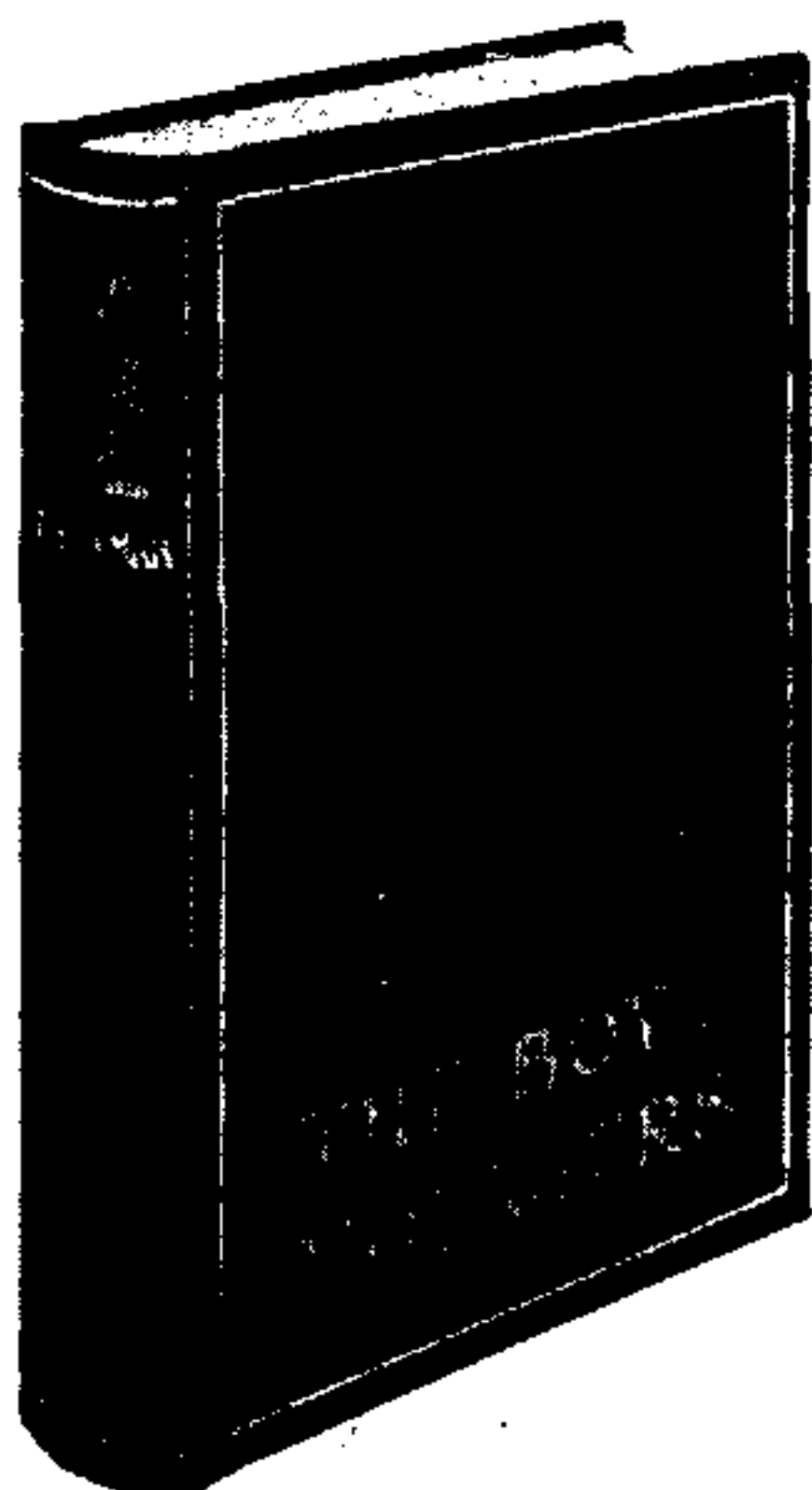
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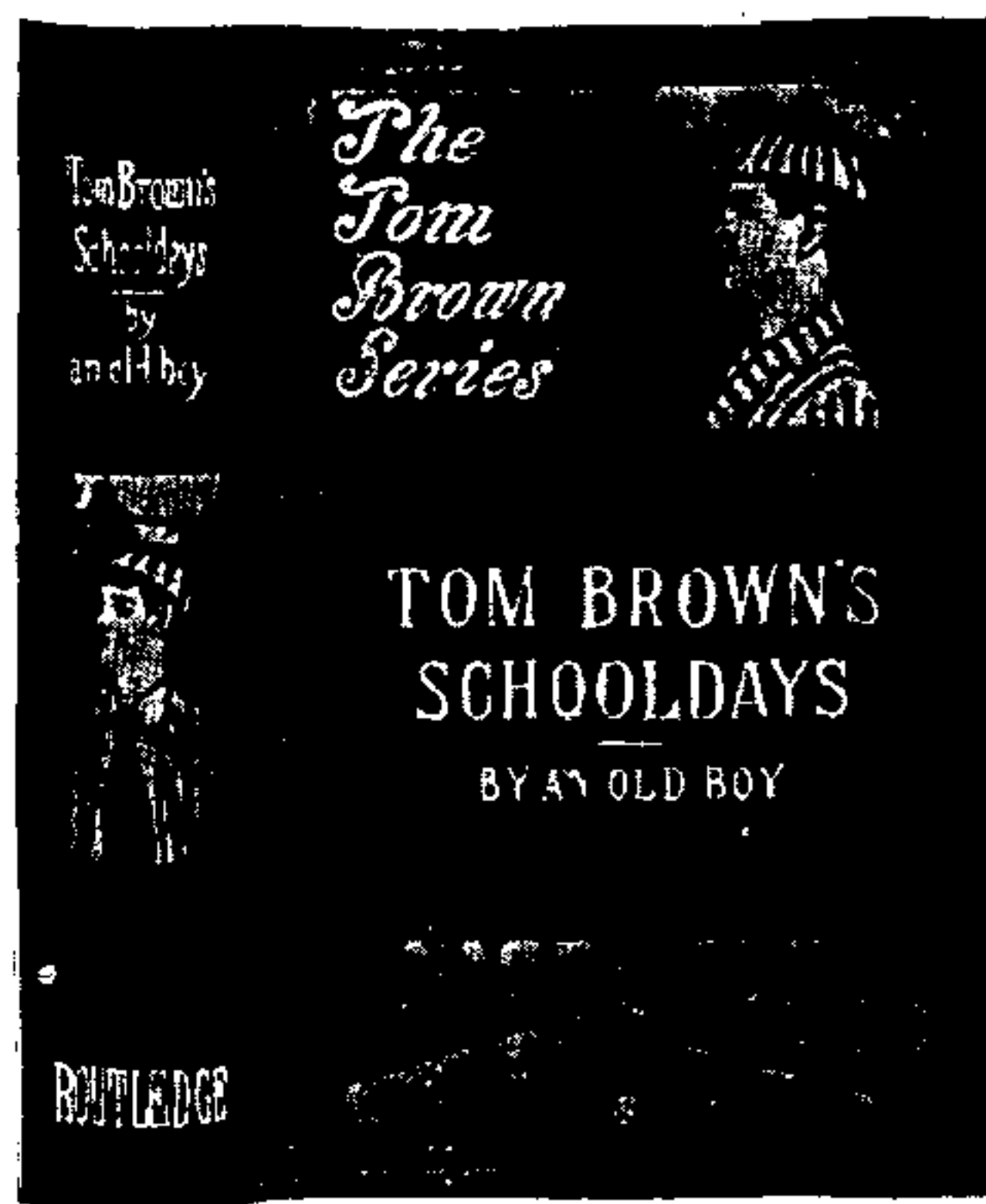
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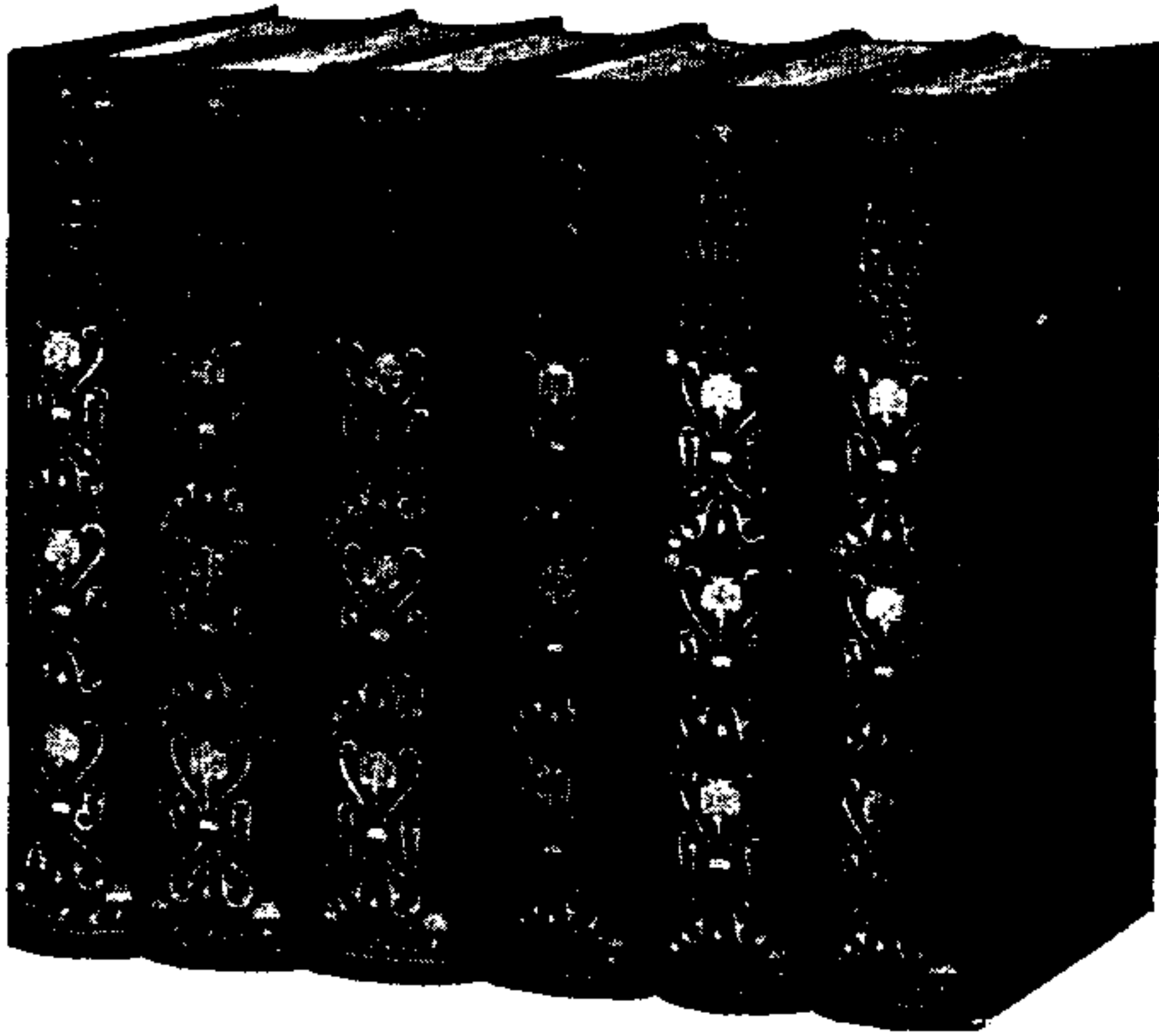
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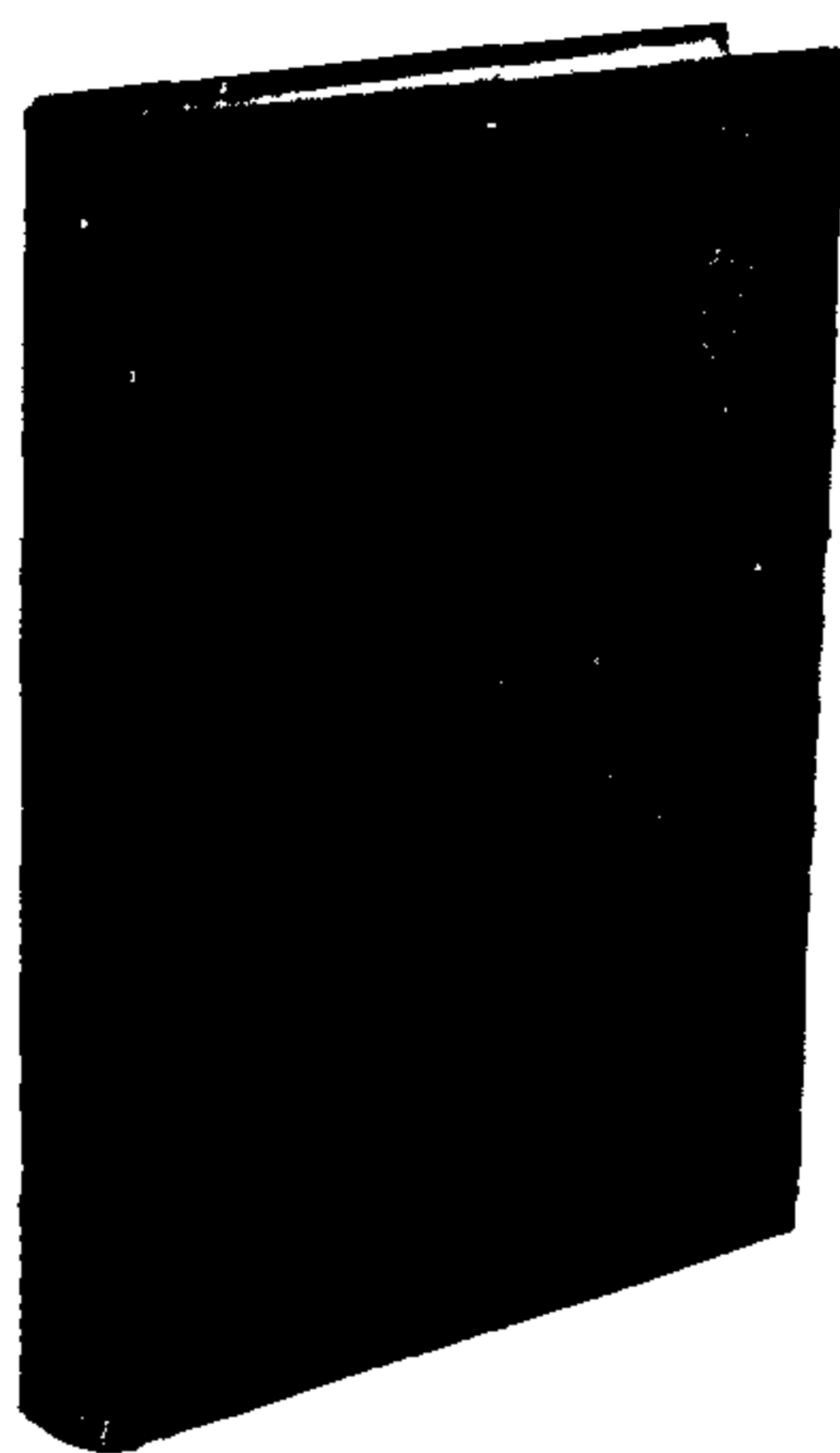
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